The Life of Solomon

by

Edmond Fleg

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THE LIFE OF SOLOMON

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THE LIFE OF SOLOMON

By

EDMOND FLEG

Author of "The Life of Moses," "The Boy Prophet," "The Wall of Weeping," etc.

Translated from the French by
VIOLA GERARD GARVIN

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TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

Monsieur Edmond Fleg needs no introduction to English-speaking people. That was was amply effected by Mr. Stephen Haden Guest's admirable translation of *La Vie de Moise*. Nor is it necessary to remind readers of the "Moses" that Monsieur Fleg's mind and style are as distinguished for gentleness and simplicity as for the seer's vision and an austere architectural power. "Solomon" has these too. And this new theme, penetrated as it is with romance and legend, brings a new quality of Arabian splendour. It is part history and part fable. Yet the poet's hand, though it can conjure, is ultimately subdued to what it works in. Which is truth.

The beauty of this book does not depend on ornament and detail. Though these, because M. Fleg's knowledge is both Hebraic and universal, are rich and faithful. Its beauty is of the bone. The chapters fall evenly about a central crisis. The climax, in Chapter XIV, is the keystone of an arch clean and significant as that made by the action of Macbeth.

It was clear that the English version must approximate as nearly as possible to the language of the Authorised Version, for reasons of colour and association, because M. Fleg drops into the actual Biblical narrative when the spirit moves him ; and because this seemed the sole English that would lend itself to the simplicity of certain episodes, and the majesty of

others. *Chronicles*, *Kings*, *Proverbs*, the *Psalms*, *Ecclesiastes*, and the *Song of Solomon*—often, only close search will reveal what is the Bible in a prose so like it. *Ecclesiastes* and the *Song of Solomon* in particular are an integral part of this narrative. But M. Fleg does not always follow the exact words of the French Bible. He takes a phrase here, a phrase there, condensing and expanding, as genius and a first-hand knowledge of Hebrew dictate. To render his subtleties I have had to follow these alterations. But the familiar English versions have only been modified where modification was necessary to express some shade of thought and cadence.

My thanks are due to M. Edmond Fleg primarily, who patiently untied the knots I sent him ; to the British Museum, which kindly verified for me English forms of the names of the Egyptian and Assyrian gods. I am not less grateful, because I did not in the end use them. The names, as they finally appear, are all taken from M. L. McLure's translation of Gaston Maspero's *l'Histoire Ancienne des Peuples de l'Orient*, the source which M. Fleg himself used. Thanks are due also to Mr. Martin Hinton, of the Natural History Museum, who ran to earth the difficult little animal called " souriceau," in Chapter VIII. It is a water chevrotain. But since that seemed clumsy in the prose, I have substituted " musk-deer," which seems to be the same animal, or one closely related.

V. G. G.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The critical study of certain sacred writings offers material more than rich enough for any historian who undertakes to write a scientific Life of Solomon. They give us, first, the son of David, making use of violence to remove his brother, Adonijah, out of the way to the throne, and to rid himself of Joab, the Captain of the Hosts, and of Shimei, his father's mentor. Next we are presented with an Oriental sovereign, the friend of commerce and of pomp ; endowed with a marked political intelligence ; worshipping the God of Israel, without abandoning the cult of idols, building fortresses, palaces, temples, and allying himself through marriage with the neighbouring dynasties. He equips a merchant fleet, and mobilises an army on the Egyptian scale and in the Egyptian manner. All of which does not hinder him from losing his empire over the land of Edom, nor from making the later division of his kingdom certain, by the ponderous load of taxes and forced labour that he imposes upon his subjects. He dies at last, after a peaceful reign, leaving behind him the remembrance of a marvellous and wealthy prince. And before long he becomes sage, poet, and philosopher also, in the memory of men.

Without searching too particularly into this Solomon of history, and determining whether or no this picture of him is truer than that given in the

Bible, I would only remark here that a third Solomon exists—the Solomon of Legend. And upon him we have documents more various and more suggestive than upon any of the others.

No hero, in fact, has more taken the popular fancy than this king, in whom the tradition of Israel recognises the author of *The Song of Songs*, *The Book of Proverbs*, and *Ecclesiastes*. Not only the Jewish and Arabic story-tellers, but the romancers of Ireland, of Ethiopia, of India, and of many other peoples, have made him the hero of countless tales. He is alternately wise man or fool, prince or beggar, cook, philosopher, master of the demons or their dupe, at once the pattern of faith and humility, and a monster of impiety and arrogance ; warrior, tyrant, or apostle of peace, in whom already the justice of the Messiah is incarnate.

It is a task for the learned to gather these folk-tales, to weigh and docket them, and to write commentaries comparing this one with that, and assigning each to their various origins or unique source. But if the poet interpret in his own fashion, and renew their form and their spirit as his predecessors have never ceased doing, is not this his licence ? And may he not consider all these as scattered elements of a great poem which has not yet been written ?

Thus I conceived my task. I did not hesitate to take liberties with my predecessors, just as they had no hesitation in amplifying or transmuting the work of their predecessors. I have not attempted rigidly to follow any of their texts. To their tales, indeed, I have sometimes even added my own interpretation and belief, in order to make the work of their imagination,

on which my own has thriven, in harmony with the temper of our time. And, to tell truth, to me, at least, nothing in the world seems less arbitrary than legend. For in its passage from generation to generation it is for ever altered and for ever renewed.

If it has not been utterly impossible to give so many contradictory stories a kind of original colour—for, after all, they have, however distantly, common origin in the Bible—one difficulty facing me at the very beginning has, perhaps, remained unsurmounted. This was the possibility of melting these many histories into a single and credible history. But as I worked, I soon found, in *The Song of Songs*, in *The Book of Proverbs*, and in *Ecclesiastes*, and in the Talmudic commentaries upon them, successive stages in a genuine psychological development; and at the end—to my great surprise, I admit—the episodes which had seemed utterly unrelated came into order spontaneously, as though they had been imagined by a single creative mind.

So true is it that mythological persons pursue, in the course of centuries, an existence as real as mysterious, and almost entirely independent even of the mind that discovered them and gave them form and being in story.

This is why Solomon, uniting Israel to the nations in his own person, appears here as a Faust, at once Hebraic and universal, in whom life, as it widens and increases, at length sums up the whole of human experience.

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THE LIFE OF SOLOMON

CHAPTER I

THE CHILD OF PEACE

At midnight, as on every night, the north wind stirred the harp-strings with his breath ; and the stirring of the harp-strings woke King David. Then, on the terrace outside the palace, waking with his harp the clear glory of the moon, King David sang before the Eternal :

" Lord, Thy justice beheld my sin ; shall not Thy pity behold my remorse ? I turned from Uriah the eyes of his wife Bathsheba ; him I pushed into the forefront of the battle, into the hail of the enemies' darts. The child that she bore me in murder and adultery, Thou madest to die, for my chastisement, O King of the World ; shall not this child, that she is about to give to my penitence, live in token of my pardon ? "

As he prayed, his prayer took wing toward the heights and awoke the prayer of the angels. And the angels sang in their turn, waking pity in the heart of the Eternal :

" Lord, give pardon to David, give pardon to Bathsheba ; that, in Thy pardon, the son who shall be born of their repentance live."

Now a voice cried in the spaces of the air :

" A child shall be born into the world this night

who shall reign in wisdom from one end of the earth unto the other end, who shall be Lord over men, over beasts, and over spirits."

At this cry, men of the islands and of the continents, all living things from the fields, from the air, and from the waters, the spirits of valley and mountain, of the rivers and the seas, of the fires and the stars, cried aloud in their places, and questioned with trembling voices :

" Whence cometh he, this mighty one ? "

But Beelzebub, the Accursed, thought in his heart :

" Of David alone can such an one be born ; for strength was promised to David, and victory to the heirs of his body for ever."

And straightway, dimming the brilliance of the moon with the shadows of his wings, the Accursed flew towards the palace, if haply he might kill the child before his first dawn.

But to the right and to the left of Bathsheba the angels had planted the standards of joy ; perfect in purity, the nursling with the almond eyes smiled radiantly at the world that smiled at him.

" King David," sang the angels, " since the day when God created us, we have descended only twice upon the earth : to see Adam born, and to see Abraham. And now, behold we are descended again to see born the child of thy repentance, the Master of Wisdom, Ambassador of the Lord to all His creatures." And while Beelzebub felt the leaden wings of his darkness to scorch, melt, and be consumed in the fiery song of the angels, the earth also cried aloud, saying :

" King David, hearest thou not, how I laugh for joy ? At Adam's birth I laughed ; but since Abel died I have wept. At Abraham's birth I laughed, but since Joseph died I have wept. And now, behold, once again, because a son is born to thee, the whole earth laugheth aloud for very happiness."

Then David and Bathsheba gave praise unto the Lord. And Nathan the Prophet, blessing their son, called him Jedidiah, which is to say Beloved of God. But the Eternal, in His goodness, made another name for him. And in this manner he bestowed it :

When a year had gone by, David, seeing the child increase in beauty, implored the Holy One, blessed be He, as follows :

" Lord, seeing that Thou hast pardoned me, is it not Thy will that I build Thee a Dwelling-Place ? I am but a man ; yet I screen my slumbers with roof-screens of cedar. But the Ark of Thy heavenly glory, with its wide-winged Cherubim, flies beneath its floating veil like a bird without nest, from the wilderness to Shiloh, from Nob to Gibeon. Is not the time come, then, for it to rest at length through the turning of the centuries in that place which, since the beginning of all things Thou hast chosen for the temple of Thy Name and Thy Presence ?

" I have squeezed Aram even as a vine in the press. I have trampled the Philistines under foot like dirt. I have beaten the Amalekites from the uprising of the sun even to its going down. The Jebusites have I scattered like chaff in the wind. And to adorn the House that I would build Thee I have already heaped up their treasures—chariots and bucklers, tripods

and vases, sapphires, rubies, silver and bronze and gold.

" Now therefore, Lord, grant that I may go up into Mount Moriah, where Thy right hand, before the light of the first day, hurled the stone on which Thou hast established the world. Let my right hand dig even to the depths until it find that stone, that on this stone it may erect Thy Sanctuary, O King of the World."

And when he had first moved the Holy Ark of the Covenant to Sion, David went up into the mountain and began to dig the rock. But as he dug, a stream of mud gushed forth from the innermost depths of the hole. And as he would have dug again, the stream became a river, and the river a torrent. And all round the mountain the valleys were flooded with the stinking tide. Then David cried aloud, saying :

" Lord, Lord, is this Thy mercy ? Shall my sin, like a new deluge, drown all things in its mud—Thy city, Thy holy mountain, yea, even the whole of Thy creation ? "

And God answered, saying :

" Be comfortable, David. After further trial, after new repentance, I will pardon thee. And the day when the doors of my Dwelling-Place shall open upon Mount Moriah the whole world shall see thy pardon. But I will that My Temple be a House of Peace, for it must build peace upon earth and in the heavens, and peace everlasting between earth and heaven.

" As for thee, thou hast been a man of battle. Thy hands stain thy crown with blood. Thy feet on the steps of thy throne tread a pavement of fallen heads. This is why thou shalt not build My sanctuary. But

for thy son, call him Solomon, which signifieth 'Peace be with him.' For peace is with him. And it is even he that shall build the Temple of Peace!"

And David called his son Jedidiah Solomon. And Solomon dedicated to peace, grew in the love of peace.

CHAPTER II

SHIMEI'S PUPIL

Now King David had a bell which the angels had given him. When he sat in judgment on his throne in the Hall of the Cedarwood Pillars, this bell at his right hand kept silence for the innocent and sounded for the guilty. Thus no crime stayed hidden, no criminal went unpunished.

But since David's transgression the bell had ceased to sound. Its silence accused guilty and innocent alike, and now, without the guidance of this unerring voice, the king faltered sometimes in giving judgment.

One day he was sitting upon his throne in the Hall of the Cedarwood Pillars. The silent bell hung at his right hand. His son Solomon, now three years old, was at his feet. A man and a woman appeared. The woman spoke, saying :

" O my king, O my father, thy handmaid appeals to thee for justice. After the death of my husband, whom I yet mourn, a prince of our town wished to marry me. I might by no means agree. But, fearing the prince's power, I resolved to take flight into a foreign country. Before my departure, I took seven earthenware pitchers, and, putting a part of my store of gold into each, I filled the pitchers with honey. Then, before witnesses, I entrusted them to

this man whom thou seest here, saying : 'By the friendship that was a bond between thee and my husband, keep safe, I pray thee, these jugs of honey against my return.'

" The prince being dead, at length I returned. I reclaimed the pitchers. Before witnesses they were given back to me. But when I was within doors, in my own home, I found them full to the bottom with honey. The gold was no longer there. Lord, Lord, what will become of me ? The judge in our town will by no means hear me, and thy Sanhedrin has sent me to thee."

" What is thy defence ? " asked the king, turning towards the man.

" I received seven pitchers of honey. I rendered up again seven pitchers of honey."

" My daughter, did these witnesses see the gold in the pitchers ? "

" No, my Lord, I alone knew that it was hidden there."

The crowd in the doorways held their peace. All awaited the decree.

And David thought : " How may I judge without witnesses ? Am I God, that I should read in their hearts ? O my bell, wherefore have the angels taken back thy voice ? "

Then, on the steps of the throne, the infant Solomon was emboldened to speak :

" O my father, O my king, why art thou so long time in pronouncing judgment ? "

" Put thyself in my place on the throne, my son. Thou shalt see what it is that maketh the judge to tremble."

He seated him on the throne. And lo, the child on the throne saw the outstretched hand of God holding the sword of justice. And he trembled. But he said :

" O my king, O my father, art thou willing that I pronounce judgment ? "

David consented, and Solomon went on :

" Let the seven pitchers of honey be brought hither."

They were brought, according as he commanded.

" Let seven empty pitchers be brought hither."

These were brought also, according as he commanded.

" Let the honey from the full pitchers be poured into the empty."

This was done. " Now let the first seven pitchers be broken in pieces."

They were broken, as he commanded. Something glistened. A gold piece was still sticking to one of the fragments of earthenware ! " The man has stolen the gold," said Solomon ; " let him restore it to the woman, and receive due punishment."

And everyone cried aloud, saying : " Verily the spirit of God is with this child."

Seeing him so young in years and so old in intelligence, King David put the child to school with Shimei the Doctor that he might be instructed in the Torah, which is the Law of Moses. Our master, Shimei, therefore, taught him how to read the sacred characters. And he read in the Holy Scriptures of original chaos and of light, of the work of the seven days and the peace that man enjoyed among the animals in the innocence of the Garden of Eden. Of

the Tree of Knowledge he read, and the Fruit of Sin, of Paradise Lost, of Abel and Cain, of the Deluge and Noah, then of iniquity repeopling the world, and again of Abraham and the tribulation of the Chosen People ; and then of Moses on the mountain, receiving the Law, by which at length the earth shall revert again to heaven.

And Shimei taught him the Sabbath and the festivals, and made him wise in prayer and in sacrifice, cleanness and uncleanness. And he instructed him in the commandments concerning blasphemy and idolatry, theft and murder, adultery and fornication. And of loans and pledges he taught him, of the slave and the poor man, of the stranger, the widow, and the orphan.

" The commandments of the Lord," he explained, " are three hundred and sixty-five, as numerous as the days of the year. And his prohibitions are two hundred and eighteen, as many as the organs of the body. For with every organ of thy body and on every day of the year oughtest thou to sanctify the Holy One, blessed be He, so that the Messiah of his peace and of his justice may come into the world."

Thus the infant Solomon learnt the Torah. But when he returned to his mother, after Shimei's lessons, ambitious Bathsheba held him with talk of another fashion.

" Thy grandfather Jesse," she said, " had seven sons. And when the prophet Samuel would have anointed one among them with the holy oil, the oil refused to flow out of the horn for the six eldest. But for David, thy father, the oil ran of itself ; and it

turned on his forehead into diamonds and pearls. David was youngest among the seven sons of Jesse, and he became king. Thou art youngest among the seventeen sons of David ; why shouldst thou not become king also ? "

" King Saul," she said again, " had a suit of armour, mighty as he himself was in stature. And David thy father was but a lad when he went before him with his sling to kill Goliath the Giant. But King Saul threw him his armour. And when he had put it on, behold his child's body filled it utterly.

" As David came to fight for Saul, thou camest, my son, to give judgment for David. And as Saul's armour was not at all too big for the body of the child David, so David's throne was not at all too big for the justice of the child Solomon. Since David, as great as Saul, became king after Saul, why should not Solomon, as great as David, become king after David ? "

Thus the child grew, listening turn by turn to Shimei and Bathsheba.

Now one day David was sitting upon his throne in the Hall of the Pillars of Cedarwood. The silent bell hung at his right hand. His son Solomon, now seven years old, was at his feet. Two men appeared. The first spoke aloud, saying :

" O my king, O my father, thy servant purchased a field from this man that thou seest here. And as I was ploughing this field, I found treasure therein. Then said I to this man : ' I purchased a field from thee, not a treasure ; take back thine own which belongeth to thee.' But he answered me, saying, ' Keep that thou hast. I sold my field unto thee with all that was in it.'

What ought we now to do, King David ? Where lieth justice in this matter ? "

David turned to the other man and asked, saying, " Wherefore refusest thou the treasure ? "

" To whom should I deliver it again, my Lord ? " he replied. " The old man who sold me the field is dead, without heir of his body."

" Divide the treasure between ye," said the king.

" How shall we divide that which belongeth to neither of us ? "

The crowd in the doorways held their peace. All awaited the decree. Then said David, turning to Solomon :

" My son, if thou wert judge in my stead, what decision wouldst thou give ? "

And Bathsheba rejoiced in her heart, thinking :

" This time he doth not wait for Solomon to propose his judgment. Of his own accord he maketh the boy judge in his place."

" Hast thou a son ? " Solomon asked the first of the two men.

" Yea, lord," he answered.

" And thou," turning to the other, " hast thou a daughter ? "

" Yea, lord."

" Well, then, let thy son and thy daughter become man and wife ; and let them together enjoy the treasure."

And it was done according as Solomon ordered. And all marvelled at Solomon.

But the Doctor Shimei continued his instruction, saying :

" My son, seek diligently after wisdom. Before the creation was wisdom created. Before the beginning of things it was already there. When wisdom was born, the mighty ocean was not. Neither were there seas nor rivers, nor springs of living water. The mountains were not established, nor the skies made fast in their place. The nights were not divided from the days, nor had light come forth from chaos. It was by wisdom, that nimble workman, that God measured the surfaces of the deep and ordained the foundations of the earth. By wisdom He ordered the tides of the sea and set the stars in their courses. And it was by this same wisdom that He appeared in flame to Moses, our Master, and dictated His commandments, so that man should achieve in his heart the work of the creation and make love to rule one day here below as it reigneth in the heights. At thy lying-down and at thy uprising, in every hour of thy joy and of thy travail, remember the Torah, my son. Who walketh in its ways buildeth the peace of the world. But he who turneth aside from it, destroyeth the peace of the world. For the world resteth upon the Torah, in which the divine wisdom, that made the world, reposeth. This is why the blessing of the Eternal shall watch over the house of the good man who practises the Torah. He shall not waver ; the earth shall belong to him ; his suffering shall be short and his reward certain. The Eternal shall lengthen his days even to eternity, and he shall be held in men's memory with praise. But a curse falleth upon the dwelling of the unrighteous. His fears shall overcome him. His sins bring forth their own punishment. A storm passeth and he is no more. His name shall fall into corruption.

Pursue not after the wicked, my son ; for their road leads but to the darkness of death. Rather choose the way of the Torah, which is the way of God, and thou shalt live."

And the counsels of Shimei were graven in the heart of Solomon. And, later, he made of them proverbs in his *Book of Proverbs*. But while he pondered these things at his mother's knee, the ambitious Bathsheba mingled other thoughts with these thoughts :

" Thy father David," she said, " was the son of a shepherd, and lo, he is become king. Thou, who art the son of a king, oughtest thou not then to become mightier than a king ? Did not a voice from heaven proclaim at thy birth that thou shouldst reign in wisdom from one end of the earth to the other end, over men, over beasts, and over spirits ? Why, then, shouldst thou not be this King of kings promised unto David, unto Israel, and unto the world ? This Messiah of Justice and Peace, through whom it shall come to pass that the wolf lieth down by the lamb, and the sheep by the young lion ; through whom the sword shall be changed into the ploughshare, and the false idols shall be cast into the dust ; through whom the yoke of the Torah shall be lifted from us, when the heart of man shall become one, and one the name of the Eternal ? "

Thus the child grew, listening, turn by turn, to Bathsheba and to Shimei.

Now, one day David was seated upon his throne in the Hall of the Cedarwood Pillars. The silent bell hung at his right hand. His son Solomon, now ten years

Of age, sat at his feet. Three brothers appeared. The eldest spoke aloud, saying :

" O our king and our judge, wilt thou permit us before thy face to consult the spirit of the prince, thy son ? "

David gave his consent.

" We are three brethren," continued the young man. " Already we were orphaned of our mother, and behold, yesterday our father died also. Now, as he lay dying, he said to us, ' I know that only one among you is my true son ; and to him alone I leave my possessions.' O prince, advise us, how we may discover the proper heir ? For we know not the secrets of the dead."

" Let the father's corpse be brought hither," commanded Solomon, " and let it be bound upright against one of these pillars."

The thing was done. " Bring me now three arrows and a bow."

They were brought. Then, turning toward the three brothers, " Let each of ye shoot an arrow at the dead man. He who shooteth most truly shall be the heir."

The crowd in the doorways held their peace. All awaited the best shot.

The eldest drew, and pierced the dead man in the hand. The second, aiming better, pierced him in the forehead ; and he smiled happily at the thought of his inheritance. The youngest took the arrow, stretched the bow, and was about to let fly, when, overcome with sorrow and anger, he threw bow and arrow to the ground and murmured :

" No, no. I will not desecrate the dead body of my

father ; it were better far to die without a heritage ! "

" It is thine ; thou art his very son," cried Solomon. All lauded his subtlety ; and Bathsheba rejoiced in her heart, thinking :

" This time it was no longer he who proposed to give judgment. Neither did David, his father, ask it of him. It was his subjects of to-morrow who already, to-day, make him their judge."

But Shimei the Doctor, said, in the anguish of his soul :

" Alas ! what shall this child do with the Torah who giveth judgment now without the Torah's help ! "

CHAPTER III

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

Even as Solomon was the son of Bathsheba, Chileab was the son of Abigail, Adonijah of Haggith, Shephatiah of Abital, Ithream of Eglah. And Amnon and Absalom, the two eldest, were the sons of Ahinoam and of Maaclah. And all these women were wives of David, and they had borne him ten other sons.

Now one day, when Solomon was returning to his mother after Shimei's lesson, he heard the sound of a great lamentation. In front of Amnon's house Absalom's sister Thamar was running. And she tore her veil as she ran, and sobbed and wept. And she cried out aloud in wild words how Amnon, her brother, had done her violence.

When David had heard the tale, he was sad in his heart. But, since he loved Amnon, first-born of his sons, too tenderly, he did not punish his detestable crime. And Amnon, to the sound of flute and tambourine, hastened into other debaucheries, while Thamar hid her shame in the house of her brother Absalom.

Then Solomon thought " Is this the chastisement for which the lessons of Shimei, my master, prepared me? He told me: ' Lust lighteth thunder in

heaven.' But Amnon desired and sullied a virgin, the daughter of his own father ; and God's wrath hath not devoured him. Is the fear of the Lord, then, naught but a fool's dream ? "

Now it came to pass in these days that there was a sheep-shearing of Absalom's flocks at Baal-Hazor, which is beside Ephraim. And he invited all the princes, his brothers, and they all followed him there, Solomon with the rest. When the shearing was over, Absalom offered them meat and spices, cakes and fermented drinks. Then, at the hour when all were merry with wine, even as Amnon was laughingly raising a golden cup to his lips, at a sign from Absalom, a blade, wielded by a slave, split the air and severed Amnon's head. And head and gold cup rolled together on the table.

Now when these tidings came to David he tore his mantle and covered his head with ashes, and crouched groaning on the earth. But Absalom, having first found shelter with Talmai, King of Geshur, returned after a space into the city of his father. And Joab, son of Zeruiah, interceded in his favour, and David received him before his face and gave him the kiss of peace.

Then thought Solomon : " Where is this justice of which Shimei continually talketh ? The murderer, he told me, meeteth the sword of vengeance in the right hand of the Almighty. But lo, now, Absalom cutteth off the head of Amnon, the son of his own father. And God leaveth him his living head, with all the pride of its tresses. This fear of God, is it naught perchance but a madman's whim ? "

And it came about after these days that David

passed over the brook Kedron, and, barefoot, went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet ; and he wept as he went and covered his head. His wives went up after him, and the princes, his sons also, with all the servants of his household and the inhabitants of his city. And all the people that were with him went upward in like manner, barefoot, and covering every man his head. And they went up, weeping as they went.

And Solomon thought : " How shall I believe on the teaching of Shimei, my master ? He said unto me : ' Whoever riseth against his father blasphemeth against God, his father, and shall die the death of the blasphemer.' But Absalom, my brother, hath sounded the horn in the tribes of Israel ; he is proclaimed king in Hebron. He maketh his father David to flee out of Jerusalem. And while he lies in the palace of David among David's concubines, lo, David seeketh refuge in the ways of the wilderness, without crown, without royalty. If the just man findeth not shelter in his justice, if his house fall in at the breath of the unrighteous, the fear of the Lord is not a fortress, nor faith in the Eternal a strong place."

While he thought in this wise, Shimei appeared on the summit of the mountain, and he cast stones at David and cried aloud, saying : " Murderer and adulterer, did I not warn thee of the vengeance of the Most High ? Amnon and Absalom enact thy crimes over again for thy punishment."

Then said Abishai, son of Zeruiah, to David : " Why permittest thou this dead dog to insult my lord the king ? "

But the king answered him, saying : " If he insult me, it is because God permits him."

And Solomon thought, " Shall my father be guilty ? He, the chosen of the God of Jacob, the Singer of the Rock of Israel, the holy one for whom the Lord was an invisible rampart ? Where is his fault ? What is his crime ? And if indeed he hath not walked before God in righteousness, if he hath sinned against the Eternal in his flesh and in his heart, why is he fulfilled with years, with promises, with blessings ? Is the fear of the Lord naught but a child's nightmare ? "

Now, after the battle of Ephraim, Absalom, the rebel son, was caught up into an oak-tree by his splendid hair, and as he did hang there, his heart was pierced three times by the darts of Joab. And David entered again into his city and into his majesty. But his soul within him was sick even unto death. And behold, on a night when Solomon slept in the palace, he was awakened in the midst of the night by the sound of a harp, and of a song which one sang with tears on the high terrace, under the brilliance of the moon :

" Lord, Lord, I have turned away from Uriah the eyes of his wife Bathsheba ; him I pushed into the forefront of the battle, into the hail of the enemies' darts. The child that she bore me in murder and in adultery Thou madest to die for my chastisement. And since I dared not punish my guilty sons, by reason of my own guilt, lo, these are dead also, stricken by Thy justice—Amnon soiled like me with lust, and Absalom stained like me with blood.

" But I, who eat my bread in ashes, who bear my

crown in tears, Thy mercy granteth that I live still, that I may repent.

" Blessed be Thou, Lord, who prolongeth my penance that it may win increase of pardon. Purify me, wash my soul clean of its iniquity, in these trials. Behold, I will teach Thy way to sinners, that they find Thee again ; unloose my tongue, that it show forth Thy favours ; open my lips, that they publish abroad Thy goodness."

Then thought Solomon :

" The hand of God is everywhere : Amnon was punished by Absalom ; Absalom was punished by Joab. By Absalom and Amnon together was David punished. But by his repentance he is succoured. Thou sayest truth, Shimei, my master. The fear of the Lord is not a fool's dream, nor a madman's whim, nor is it a child's nightmare. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ! "

CHAPTER IV

DAVID'S TESTAMENT

Now King David was old and full of days and he felt the coldness of death invade his bones. They covered him with clothes, but he got no heat. Wherefore his servants said unto him :

" Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin, and let her stand before the king and let her cherish him. She shall be in his arms, and heat shall return to my lord the king."

So they sought throughout all the borders of Israel, and at last, in the fields of Shulam, they found a damsel surpassing in youth and beauty—Abishag, the shepherdess. And she took care of the king and ministered unto him. He took her in his arms that he might get heat. But he had no intercourse with her. And just as in other days David the shepherd, by his singing, restored light and sweet reason to old King Saul, so now the shepherdess Abishag, by her young beauty, restored the warmth of life to old King David.

One evening, while the shepherdess watched over the king, the ambitious Bathsheba appeared. And she bowed low, and spoke with him, saying :

" Is my lord the king aware that his son Adonijah,

son of Haggith, hath slain to-day sheep and oxen, and hath called together for a festival all the princes, sons of the king, with Abiathar the High Priest, and Joab the Captain of the Host. But Nathan the prophet and Zadok the Priest, and Shimei the Doctor, and Benaiah, Solomon's friend, and Solomon, and thy handmaid, these they have not invited. To-morrow under the noonday sun the rebels will eat and drink before the face of Adonijah, and behold they will cry aloud, 'Health and long life to Adonijah!' And it shall come to pass, when thou art gathered to thy fathers, that thy handmaid and Solomon our son, dearest of all among thy children, shall die by the sword of Adonijah. Wilt thou, my lord, suffer another Absalom to seize thy crown? Or wilt thou not rather, being forewarned of their designs, pronounce with thy mouth before the people him who shall sit upon the throne of my lord the king after him?"

Then David answered and said: "To-morrow, at dawn, let all the princes my sons assemble in the Hall of the Pillars of Cedarwood, together with Nathan the Prophet, Shimei the Doctor, Abiathar the High Priest, Zadok the Priest, Joab the Captain of the Host, Benaiah, Solomon's friend, and all the chief men of my people and all my household. And the Eternal shall appoint before all men whom He chooseth to reign over Israel after David."

And behold, at dawn, when they were all gathered together in the hall, the wing of an angel glimmered between the two pillars near the throne. And the hand of an angel put into the king's hand a golden leaf. And upon this golden leaf questions were

inscribed in letters of gold. Then the king spoke, saying :

" Who knoweth the answers to these heavenly questions, shall become king after me in Israel."

Then he read out : " What is everything ? What is nothing ? "

And in the silence Solomon's voice alone made answer, saying :

" The world is nothing. God is everything."

Then David read again : " What thing is most certain ? and what least ? "

And in the silence Solomon's voice alone made answer, saying :

" Death is most certain. That which is least certain is death after death."

And lastly David read : " What thing is of most account ? What is of least ? "

And in the silence Solomon's voice alone made answer, saying :

" The fear of peace is of least account ; that which is of most account is peace."

Then all cried aloud :

" Praise be to God, who giveth the earth a king worthy of heaven."

Now in these days Solomon was thirteen years old, and they caused him to ride upon King David's mule, and brought him to the torrent of Gihon. And Zadok the Priest anointed his head with the holy oil. They blew the trumpet, and all the people cried aloud, rejoicing with a great joy :

" God save King Solomon."

But all they who had plotted the rebellion turned pale with fear and went every man his way. And

Adonijah the son of Haggith, Abiathar the High Priest, and Joab the Captain of the Host took refuge in the Tabernacle and caught hold of the horns of the altar.

But Solomon said, " Let them not rise against the Lord's anointed and there shall not fall to the ground a hair of their heads."

When evening drew in, and Solomon was gone up again into the palace, David received him, holding Abishag the shepherdess close in his arms that the warmth of her young body might give heat to his. And he addressed him, saying :

" My son, give heed to the words of my mouth and lend thine ears to my discourse. The wisdom above all other wisdoms is to acquire wisdom. Seek her, then ; for her worth is greater than pearls, more precious than oil or wine. Exalt her and she shall promote thee ; she shall give to thine head an ornament of grace, a crown of glory. For it is through her that princes reign, and the mighty sit in judgment upon earth imposing their government. But bethink thee of thy heart, to keep hold on it. For loving kindness is a king's buckler. And love upholdeth his throne. And howsoever wise thou mayst become in wisdom, never take thyself for a wise man. For man is indeed master of his resolves. But neither resolves, nor prudence, nor wisdom avail ought against the Eternal. Lastly, do not transgress the three commandments which God gave to Moses the Prophet for the guidance of kings, saying, ' Let them not keep about them too many horses and chariots.' For horses and chariots, being instruments of war, lead to war.

" ' Let them not possess multitudes of women, for fear lest their hearts be made to wander. Neither let them gather together great store of silver and gold, lest they lose their souls thereby.' For so soon as thou breakest these three commandments, which, by the Lord's will, reign over us kings, then shall the Torah itself cry toward the Lord, and the Lord will give ear unto that cry."

Now, during the night, while he lay sleepless upon his couch and pondered these precepts from which later he framed certain proverbs that are to be found in *The Book of Proverbs*, behold, in the middle of the night, Solomon heard a song, startling the cool brilliance of the moon. But it was no longer David singing upon the terrace, no longer the harp. A voice sweeter than any harp, the voice of Abishag the shepherdess murmured, saying :

" King David sleeps ;
But my heart waketh.
Whither is my beloved gone ?
Whither art thou turned aside ?
Wilt thou go up into thy garden,
To the beds of anemones,
To feed thy flock in the gardens
And to pluck lilies ?
Or wilt thou go down into the garden of nuts
To see the young shoots of the valley ?
As an apple-tree among the trees of the wood,
So is my beloved among the young men.
His head is as most fine gold,
His locks are bushy
And black as a raven.
His eyes are as the eyes of doves.
By the rivers of waters,

His cheeks are as a bed of spices,
His lips are roses.
Why art thou not there? Why comest thou not, my beloved? Ah, that I might be kissed with the kisses of thy mouth."

And Solomon heard the song of the Shulamite woman. And the eyes of his heart sought round about his couch, if perchance he might see Abishag in the night.

Next day, David spoke again to him, saying :

" The duty of a king is sometimes cruel. For the judge who taketh a guilty man for innocent is as guilty in the eyes of the Eternal as he who giveth sentence against an innocent man. But to give sentence justly a king must know himself innocent. Now I, who have wept for my sins more tears than all men together have shed since first the earth was set below the sky, I feel myself guilty still. And, feeling myself guilty, I have not chastened thy brothers for their crimes. And, refusing to chasten them, I have indeed increased their crimes. Remember, then, my son, all those that I leave unpunished : Shimei the Doctor, who, in the hour of my sorrow, stoned me with stones and with curses. And Adonijah, the son of Haggith, who, with Abiathar the High Priest and Joab Captain of the Host, would have risen up against me like another Absalom. Hold these in memory, my son. And if one of them plan in the days to come a new crime, deal with him prudently, according to thy forewarning."

Now that night, as Solomon lay upon his couch

pondering the hard duties of kings, he heard the voice of Abishag singing in the cool brilliance of the moon :

" King David sleeps,
But my heart waketh.
Where art thou, my beloved ?
Whither art thou gone ?
Before the shadows flee away,
Before the day ripen,
Come, my love, bounding like a roe upon the mountain of myrrh,
Running upon the hill of incense like to a young hart.
Come, my beloved, let us go forth to wander in the fields.
Let us lodge under the oak-trees.
There shalt thou give me thy loves,
And in the morning let us get up early to the vineyards.
Let us see if the vine flourish,
Whether the tender grape appear
And the pomegranates put forth their buds.
Where art thou, my beloved, whither art thou gone ?
Ah, that I might be kissed with the kisses of thy mouth."

And Solomon heard the song of the Shulamite ; and the eyes of his flesh sought round about his couch if perchance they might find Abishag in the night.

On the morrow, David spoke again to him, saying :

" God armed my arm with valiance for the fight. He bowed my enemies under me. Peoples from afar brought tribute and laid it at my feet. The sons of strangers licked my sandals. By war have I prepared peace for thee. But to the end that thy reign may be peaceful, do not thou prepare further war. And the Temple which mine hands have not yet builded upon the hill, let thy hands build it to the peace of the Lord. For His name is Peace, and thy name, which He gave thee, is Peace also ! "

Now, that night, as Solomon lay upon his couch thinking on the Cherubim of the Holy Ark of Covenant, on the altar of perfumes and the altar of sacrifice, on the hyacinth veil and on the candlestick of gold, on the threshold and on the battlements of the Temple that was not yet, behold his ears in the silence longed for the song of Abishag. But David slept, and the shepherdess slept. And Solomon, alone upon his couch, murmured :

" How fair she is, the Shulamite woman, how passing fair.
Her hair is as a flock of goats
That come down from Mount Gilead ;
Her teeth are like a flock of sheep,
Which go up from the washing
In two peerless rows.
Her stature is like to a palm-tree.
And her two breasts are two grapes.
Oh, that I might embrace that palm-tree,
That I might press those grapes.
Where art thou, O Shulamite, whither art thou gone ?
Would that I might be kissed with the kisses of thy mouth."

Now, on a Sabbath, King David sat reading in the Torah, if by that means he might avoid the Angel of Death. Abishag leaned against the lattice regarding the distant mountains. And Solomon regarded Abishag.

On a sudden, drawing nearer to her, the son of David came forth into the sunlight. But as he moved, his shadow fell across the Torah in which his father was reading. The king raised his eyes from the holy book. And straightway the invisible Angel of Death, no longer held back by the blessed Scriptures, brandished his invisible blade.

Then David cried aloud with a great cry. For the

last time his eyes searched the palm of his right hand, where in imperishable characters he had written the story of his sin. And he groaned with a mighty groan crying :

" Lord, Lord, what shall I say on the Day of Judgment if Uriah rise up in his blood before the throne of Thy glory and accuse me ? "

And behold, a voice, the daughter of heaven, answered, saying : " Fear not. I will entreat thy pardon."

Then the face of David shone in the midst of its repentance. And his spirit, taking flight, paused for a moment, to leave a smile upon his lips.

And Solomon closed the eyes of the dead king, washed his body, and wrapped him in a shroud. And with crying and lamentation all the people of Israel conducted him to the tomb.

Now, when David slept again with his fathers, Abishag the shepherdess entreated the living king, saying :

" My lord the king, wilt thou now that thy handmaid return again unto her flocks ? "

But Solomon bade her remain.

CHAPTER V

THE RING OF HEAVEN

Now when he had made an end of mourning, the son of David went up to Gibeon where his father had left the Altar and the Tabernacle made by Moses in the Wilderness. And there he offered up in token of thanksgiving a thousand burnt offerings. And there, in a dream by night, the Lord appeared unto him and said :

" Ask what I shall give thee ? "

And Solomon answered :

" Lord, Thou hast shewn unto my father, David, great mercy. For Thou hast crowned his head with a crown. And now, behold, Thou makest me to reign in his stead. And I am but a little child scarce come to his sixteenth year. I am not skilled how I shall bear myself, and yet Thou confidest unto me Thy people which Thou has chosen. And even among these must I render justice and build peace and the Temple of Thy peace. Give me, then, Lord, an understanding heart to judge Thy people with wisdom, in the name of judgment ; and a seeing eye wherewith to compass peace. For the glory of the Eternal is hidden in a cloud. But the glory of a king must shine forth even as the eye of day."

These words were pleasing to the Lord. And He said unto Solomon : " Because thou hast not asked

for thyself length of days, neither asked riches for thyself, nor pleasure, nor happiness, nor victory over thy enemies, nor glory ; but because thou hast asked this thing only, understanding, to render justice and to build my peace : behold, I have done according to thy words. I give thee a wise and an understanding heart, such as no man has had before thee, such as no man shall have after thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked ; even power which is also glory and victory over thine enemies, and I have given thee, further, pleasure and joy and riches and fullness of days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and commandments, then will I walk with thee to bless thy footsteps. Behold ! "

And Solomon looked with the eyes of dream and saw four angels standing before him. Their faces were without feature. And their bodies, formless and void, swayed with the swaying murmur of their voices :

" Who are ye ? " he demanded.

And they bowed twice toward him and answered, saying :

" We are the angels who ride the four winds of heaven. The Lord made us. And now He sendeth us to thee, that we may serve thee and do thy will. At thy bidding we shall unloose our storms, or bind them in chains. At thy whisper, we shall blow from the four corners of the world to that region thou desirest. At thy command we shall swing thee into the high places of the air, and set thee down again upon the place beneath."

So saying, the chief of the angels gave Solomon a sapphire. And he made to shine upon it these words,

which were graven thereon : " The King of the World is the Lord Eternal." Then he said again :

" When thou hast need of us and of our services, raise the sapphire toward the sky. We shall be there."

And behold these angels faded into the darkness of the dream. And other angels stood in their place. The first had wings like stone, ribbed and veined with shining metal. The second had wings smooth and fragrant as a green meadow with sweet flowers growing therein. The third had rosy wings that branched like coral. And the wings of the fourth were pale even as foam.

" Who are ye ? " he demanded of them.

And they bowed themselves before him three times, and answered saying : " We are the angels who rule the marches of the earth and of the seas. The Lord who made us now sendeth us to thee, that we may serve thee and do thy will. At thy bidding we shall gather in the riches of the earth, and bring them to thee ; and we shall discover for thee the treasures of the deep. At thy desire shall we dry up the oceans, or dissolve mountains in their waves. At thy command shall we submerge the valleys or make lofty peaks to rear their heads in the midst of the plain."

And the chief of the angels gave Solomon an emerald. And he made to gleam upon it these words which were graven thereon : " Majesty and Power belong to the Eternal." Then he said again : " When thou hast need of us, and of our services, raise this emerald to the sky. We shall be there."

And behold these angels also melted into the

shadows of dream. And other angels stood in their place. The first wore the aspect of a whale, the second of an eagle. The third was like unto a lion, and the fourth to a snake.

And Solomon spoke to them, saying : "Who are ye ? "

They bowed themselves before him seven times and answered :

"We are the angels of life. God, our Creator, hath ordained that we bow the birds of the air to thy service, and the beasts of the field and of the waters also, that they make pleasant thy times of eating and thy times of playing. And they shall also defend thee from thine enemies. And they shall teach thee their tongues that thou mayest learn the secrets of the waters, of the fields, and of the air."

And the chief of these angels gave Solomon a ruby. And he made these words to sparkle upon it which were graven thereon : " Let the breath of all living things praise the Eternal." Then he said again : " When thou hast need of us and of our services, raise this ruby to the skies. We shall be there."

Now when these angels had vanished into the dark places of the dream, four other angels appeared and stood before him. Their bodies were of wood, of bronze, and of granite. And they had a thousand heads, horned, or crested, or maned ; a million feet, some hooved, others shaped like talons or like fins. Their million hands carried jewels and swords, fruits of the earth, and stars.

And Solomon spoke to them saying : " Who are ye ? "

And when they had bowed themselves before him twelve times they answered : " We are the angels who rule over all spirits everywhere, over those below the earth and those on it ; over those who inhabit the airy spaces between heaven and earth, between earth and heaven. Man hath made idols of them. And God who created them, and who alone permitteth them to live, hath enjoined us that we bend them to thy yoke, so that their dominion may become thy dominion, their knowledge thy knowledge."

And the chief of these angels gave Solomon a carbuncle, and made to shine upon it these words which were graven thereon : "The Lord our God, the Lord is One." Then he added : " When thou hast need of us and of our services, raise this carbuncle to the sky. We shall be there."

Then, in the midst of the lightnings of the dream, the voice of God thundered, commanding, " Michael, Michael, take the Ring of Heaven from under the glory of My Throne, and carry it to Solomon."

The Archangel took the ring which bore the four letters of the ineffable name upon a seal shaped like a five-pointed star. And behold, the four stones given to Solomon by the four visitations of angels were suddenly set within the splendour of the ring, which shone and flashed like continuous lightning, and blinded the Seraphim with its fires.

Then, in the midst of the shudderings of dream, the voice of Adam echoed, lamenting, " Solomon, Solomon, art thou he who shall possess the ring ? In the pleasant places of Eden, God put it upon

my finger, saying, ' This ring, which is the ring of power, I give to thee, Adam, and thou shalt keep it so long as thou walkest in my ways and keepest faith with me. For it is written that thy power shall come forth from thine obedience.' It was mine. And when I possessed it, my arms, for very happiness, reached from one end of the earth to the other; and for very pride my stature increased from earth even as high as heaven. But now, having lost it through my transgression, I suffer continually. Drop by drop my buried heart is drained of its life-blood and lieth rotting in the stone of Mount Moriah which God made the foundation of the world. And across hills and valleys, over islands and continents, in the corruption of my scattered limbs, which my sin tore asunder, seventy nations rend themselves in sunder. Son of David, son of David, wilt thou bring hither in its purity the Ring of Heaven, and so give back again, to the Universe, her lost purity? I am torn with suffering, I am pierced with sorrow. Wilt thou be this Messiah promised long since to thy people and to thy father, who shall awaken the heart beats of my life imprisoned in the holy stone ; who shall unite by peace my riven flesh to my dismembered bones and so fashion a new Adam from the fragments of mankind? Take the ring, O son of David, take the ring ! Be Master of the World and raise me up again from the dead ! "

Now in the translucent airs of dream, Solomon took the ring and while the four letters of the star and the four jewels shone radiantly upon his finger, behold, the winds came and bore him over the waves and over the mountain peaks. And

invisible hands heaped at his feet sheaves of corn and vine branches, and purples and silks, and pearls. And the beasts couched before him and spoke to him in their proper tongues. And captive spirits confessed unto him their secrets. And kings bowed down to him and licked his sandals.

And he murmured in the fullness of his heart :

" Is this thy desire that is come to pass, Bathsheba, my mother ? Shall I hearken to the ambitions of thy mouth ? "

And his lips trembled. And his heart trembled also.

And as he trembled in his dream, behold he awakened, saying : " This was nothing but a dream."

But as dawn trembled on the horizons of the night, birds began to sing, and lo ! he understood the speech of birds !

" Waken to God, sleepers of the night," cried the Cock.

And the lark answered,

" Praise God, praise God, Who awakeneth the world."

Then, in the trembling moment of waking, Solomon saw his hand tremble. And behold, on his finger, the Ring of Heaven shone and glittered. For a long while he looked at it with his awakened eyes, reading and reading again the words engraved on the four stones : " The Lord our God, the Lord is One."

" Let the breath of all living things praise the Eternal."

" Majesty and Power belong to the Eternal."

" The King of the World is the Lord Eternal."

And he said :

" The King of the World is the Lord Eternal, and

shall I be the King of the World?" Lord, Lord, I asked wisdom of Thee, and Thou offerest me Power with Wisdom, that Thou mayest prove me. Grant then that I have wisdom never to use my power."

And, turning the ring, its four mystic letters and its four jewels, round upon his fingers, he extinguished their glory in the palm of his hand.

CHAPTER VI

THE SHEPHERD'S TREASURE

Now when Solomon had come down from his journey to the high place that was at Gibeon, even to Jerusalem, he said : " Before all things, the House of the Lord."

And on Mount Moriah, where once avenging waters had jetted out, when David digged into its depths with his guilty hand, in his turn Solomon sought for the place where the foundation stone of the world lay hidden. And as he sought on the Moriah he found a field which belonged to two brothers. The elder was a poor man, but he had neither wife nor child depending on him. The younger was rich, but heavily burdened with a family. And on the night after the harvest, Solomon came upon the rich man adding certain sheaves to the portion of his poorer brother, for he thought : " My brother hath neither wife nor child to provide for. But all the same he is poor." And Solomon surprised the poor man adding sheaves to the portion of his richer brother, for he thought : " My brother is rich, but he hath a wife and many children to provide for."

Then the king thought :

" Verily it must be in this place of brotherly love that the angel once saved Isaac as he lay bound on the rock under the sacrificial knife. This must be that place where once the Ark saved Noah as he fled from sin on

the waters of the Deluge. In this place once the right hand of the Lord mingled dust from the four corners of the earth to fashion flesh for Adam. And in this place now, in the stone which holdeth up the world—even that stone launched from heaven before the First Day by the hand of the Eternal—the heart of the first man lieth buried."

Now, as Solomon dug, his golden mattock laid bare the stone. And behold, this was the stone which was to bear the Temple, and by means of the Temple and the Peace of God, to compass the Peace of Man. And he heard in the stone a noise like the noise of a beat. And after a long silence there came the sound of a stronger beat. And after a shorter silence, a beat even stronger. And then other beats came quick and clear. And always they grew stronger and more certain.

Then he said :

" Praise be to God. The heart of man beginneth again to beat ! "

And he came up again out of the depths. Then, to the end that Israel and the nations might join together in the building of that Temple which was to unite all peoples among themselves, he sent a messenger to ask help of the Pharaoh of Egypt, Vaphres, an enemy of Israel. And Pharaoh sent again unto him, announcing the coming of eight myriads of builders. But first Pharaoh took counsel with the stars, and according to their advice, he had chosen for the company all those who were fated to die within that year. But Solomon guessed the trick when he saw their faces. And he sent them back again to Pharaoh, and along with them a like number of biers made of cypress wood. And he bade them say to Pharaoh : " When thou

hast need of coffins ask them from me ; but keep thine own corpses."

But Hiram, King of Tyre, of Sidon, and of all Phœnicia, to whom Solomon had addressed the same request as he had addressed to Pharaoh, sent to him in writing this answer :

" Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who hath made of the son of David my friend, a king like to his father. Behold I send thee, for thy Temple, a Tyrian, one Huram, whose mother was of the daughters of Naphtali. He is a man skilful to chase in gold and in silver, and cunning in the casting of bronze, in sculpture of timber, in engraving stone, in weaving linen, and fine purple, scarlet, and crimson. And I send thee with him eight myriads of Phœnicians and Tyrians, artisans and masons. Let my Lord the king command only that provision be made for their nourishment."

Then Solomon sent orders into Galilee, and Samaria, to the Ammonites, to the Moabites, and to the Gileadites, charging them that every month they should furnish 10,000 measures of corn and of wine. Judea must provide oil, and Arabia flesh. And those of Israel, with the peoples of other nations, assembled together for the building of the Temple.

Now one evening when Solomon was walking in his garden and calculating the measurements of the future Sanctuary, he heard a voice murmuring in a thicket of orange trees :

" Thou hast ravished my heart,
My beloved,
With a glance of thine eyes,
Thou hast ravished my heart ;

How fair are thy caresses, my love,
Yea, fairer than wine.
Thy lips distil the sweetness of the honeycomb,
The scent of thy garments
Is as the scent of Lebanon.
Thou hast ravished my heart,
My beloved,
Thou hast ravished my heart."

And the voice of Abishag answered :

" Thou art come, my beloved, thou art come.
Thy left hand is under my head
And thy right doth embrace me.
My beloved is mine, and I am his.
O ! that thou wert as my brother.
O ! that thou hadst sucked the breasts of my mother,
Then might I see thee before all the world,
Then would I kiss thee,
Yea, I should not be despised.
But lo, I am spied on, I am a captive.
Bear me hence to the mountains of spices, bear me hence,
bear me hence, my beloved."

Solomon did not reveal himself. Neither did he reveal his anger. Neither did he reveal his mighty sorrow. For, as he wrote much later in his *Proverbs*, " The heart alone knoweth his own bitterness."

The next day he had Abishag brought before him, and he said to her : " Wilt thou be mine ? "

But the Shulamite answered not. And he thought :

" On my finger I hide the ring that can give me the world ; and shall I not have this shepherdess ? " And he would have raised the brilliance of the four jewels to the sky constraining to the help of his love all the powers in earth and air. But a voice within him cried, saying : " Thou hast chosen wisdom ! "

And, without a word, he dismissed the Shulamite.

On the next day following this, the ambitious Bathsheba appeared before him, bowed low and said : " Is the king, my son, aware that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, coveteth Abishag the shepherdess, and would take her to wife ? If the king do not consent and give her to Adonijah, he will set fire again to the straws of discord in Israel ; and with him Joab the Captain of the Host and Abiathar the High Priest."

Then Solomon called to mind the counsel of David. And he sent unto Abiathar, bidding him betake himself to Anathoth, to his own fields. And he made Zadok High Priest in his place. But Joab the Captain of the Host and Adonijah the son of Haggith, he caused to die.

Nevertheless, when they were dead and he lay in the fevers of sleeplessness, he demanded of their ghosts : " Did I put ye to death, indeed to preserve peace, or was it that I might keep the Shulamite ? "

One night, Abishag was sleeping. And the shepherd came to sing under the lattice of her window :

" Rise up my love, my fair one,
Open to me,
For my head is covered with dew,
And my locks are damp from the night.
Open to me, my fair one, and come away,
For, lo, the winter is past,
The rain is over and gone,
The flowers appear on the earth,
The fig-tree putteth forth
Her green figs,
The vines with the tender grape
Give a good smell,
And the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in the land.
Open to me, my beloved, open to me and come away !

And the damsel made answer :

"How shall I open?
I have put off my gown ; how shall I put it on ?
I have washed my feet ; how shall I now defile them ? "

But she rose up, put on her shoes and her garments and went to open to him. Her hand dripped with myrrh, and myrrh dripped upon the bolts of the door. But when she had opened the door, the shepherd was no longer there. The archers had seized him and borne him away. And they shut him in a tower of the palace, as the king had commanded.

She went forth. She sought him in the garden, but found him not. She sought him in the city, but she could not find him. And she cried to the girls that she met by the way :

" I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye come across my beloved, that ye tell him that I am sick of love." And she cried to the watchman that went the rounds of the city :

" Have ye not seen my beloved, him that I love with a love stronger than death ? "

But the guards seized her also, as the king had bidden And they tore her veil and they smote and bruised her, and at last shut her up in the tower of the palace.

The next day Solomon had the shepherd brought before him, and spoke unto him, saying :

" I have a vineyard at Baal Hamon. Each of my farmers bringeth me a thousand shekels for its fruits. Behold the vineyard is thine. Get thee gone to it, and let not thy feet bring thee hither again."

But the shepherd answered, saying : " Keep thy vineyard, Solomon, and the thousand shekels of thy

farmers. My vineyard, which is mine, I keep. I taste of its fruits without farmers."

Then Solomon had Abishag brought before him, and he spoke unto her, saying : " Stay with me, and thou shalt be my queen."

But she answered :

" Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it. If a king give his royalty to purchase love, he loseth his royalty, but he winneth not love."

And Solomon felt the four gems shining and burning in his hand. And he would have raised the ring of power to the sky. But a voice within him cried : " Thou hast chosen wisdom."

Now it was the morning hour, when the king, sitting upon his throne in the Hall of the Pillars of Cedar, gave judgment among his people. And when all the company were gone in, the shepherd and the Shulamite, both bound in chains, stayed in the doorway among the assembly to hear the justice of the king.

Then came there forth two women that were harlots, and the first, who had a child in her arms, said unto Solomon :

" Let my lord the king render justice unto his handmaid. I and my companion were both delivered of a son on the same day. And it came to pass, after thirty-three days, that we went down to the river to bathe our bodies and cleanse ourselves of impurity. But first we set down our two sons on the grassy bank of the river. Now, as the water enveloped us, a jackal came and devoured this woman's son. I took mine into my arms again ; behold him here. But she

claimed him from me, crying : 'He is mine ; he is mine.' "

" Yea," cried the other courtesan, " for the jackal devoured thy son. The living child thou hast stolen from me. He is my son ; he is my son." And seizing the child in the arms of the other woman, she would have torn him from her.

Then Solomon called the headsman, and said unto him :

" Take thy axe and divide the child in two. And give half to the one and half to the other."

Then the mother of the living child was moved with fear for her son, and cried out : " Have pity, lord, and let it live. In no wise slay it."

But the other answered : " Let it be neither mine nor thine." And to the headsman she screamed : " Take it ; take it, and divide it."

Then Solomon said to the headsman : " Take the child, but in no wise slay it. Give it, rather, to the woman who begged that it might live. For she is its mother."

All marvelled at the king and at his subtlety. But when these had gone out, Abishag came forward, threw herself on her knees, and said : " My lord the king, O thou that shalt unite the peoples to Israel, and Israel to the Eternal God, this mother hath found favour in thy sight, for that she would not suffer her son's body to know division. And wilt thou then divide thy handmaid's soul ? " Then was the king ashamed. With his own hands he raised her up. And loosing her chains and the chains of her shepherd he said unto them :

" Go in peace."

And while the nations and the peoples of Israel

assembled for the building of the Temple, Solomon assembled his memories and the words that he had overheard. And on a parchment he made a poem which sang the loves of the Shulamite and the shepherd boy.

Now the poem is called *The Song of Songs*, and Solomon, to the end of his days, knew that no song was more pleasant to the Lord. For, in singing the loves of the shepherd boy and the Shulamite, he had sung also the loves of Israel and of the Eternal God. But at that time he knew it not. As he wrote much later in his *Proverbs* : " Where man and woman come together in love, the spirit of God dwelleth."

CHAPTER VII

THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

The Lord had said: "When thou buildest the House of My peace, I charge thee, use no iron. For iron is warlike."

Now in these days after he had assembled eight myriads of journeymen from among the nations and ten myriads of journeymen from out of Israel, he set three thousand and three hundred overseers over them to put the people to work. Then he consulted Shimei the Doctor, saying:

"How shall we move blocks of stone from the mountain without the aid of iron? And how, without its aid, shall we quarry and polish them?" And Shimei answered:

"Let the king make use of the Schamir.[1] For the Schamir hath but to touch the hardest stone and it is cut through. God created it on the eve of the first Sabbath. And with it Moses engraved the Ten Commandments upon the two Tables of Stone.

"But where shall the Schamir be found?"

"No man knoweth."

[1] *Schamir.* A mysterious worm which Persian and other tradition wove round the Solomon Legends. It was able to cut the hardest stone. In some versions it is called a stone. In early rabbinical fable it is neither worm nor stone, but something more than either, called "a creature"—the impersonation of a mysterious force. In Greek versions the force becomes a plant. In the English *Gesta Romanorum* it is again a worm, called thumare. Gervaise of Tilbury speaks of it in connection with Solomon as a worm called thumare. It is met with in Iceland and nearly all European countries.—See Baring Gould's *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages.*

" How then may we find it ? "

" Look in thy wisdom and read."

And Solomon thought :

" If man knoweth not, perchance the beasts may know. And God gave me the power of understanding in their tongues. Will it not be wisdom to use in the service of the Lord, the power that I hold from him ? "

And he raised the four jewels of the ring together with the seal which bore the five pointed star and the four letters of the ineffable Name, to the sky. And he called on the birds of the air and on all the beasts of the earth, and the fish that swim in the waters, and bade them come to him.

Two by two they came, in like order as they had formerly presented themselves before Noah that they might go up into the Ark. And they thronged round him peaceably, as once they thronged round Adam in the Garden of Eden.

And he asked them, saying :

" Where is the Schamir ? "

" I have not seen it," answered the ass, the lamb, and the bull. And the tiger, the elephant, and the leopard replied that they knew nothing thereof.

" I have never met with it," answered the toad, the viper, and the serpent. And also the carp, the whale, and the sturgeon denied knowledge of it. " I have never found it," answered the ant, the bee, and the butterfly. And also the sparrow, the nightingale, and the vulture said that they had never come upon it.

Now when he had questioned them in vain, one after the other, Solomon noticed that the sea eagle alone had not come at his call. So he commanded, " Let the nest of the sea eagle and his young be

brought hither to me." And Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, went and sought the nest. And he brought it again to Solomon.

And Solomon gave order, saying :

" Let a bell of crystal be set upon the nest."

And Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, covered the nest with the transparent bell.

Now the eagle, flying from the west into the east, and from the south into the north, sought over plain and forest and mountain for the nest and his little ones. When he saw them under the transparent bell, he stooped from the height of heights and coming at it, essayed to break the crystal with his claws. The bell did not break. And the eagle soared upwards again, uttering a loud cry and disappeared into the air.

All that day and all the following night there was no sign of him. But on the morrow they observed him circling and wheeling in the dawn. Swiftly he descended. In his beak he bore the Schamir, which he set down upon the bell without a sound. And, behold, it shivered and broke into pieces. Then Solomon demanded of the eagle, saying :

" Where hast thou obtained the Schamir ? "

" In the Mountain of Sleepers."

And the sea eagle took the nest with his little ones in his claws, and conducted Benaiah with the household of Solomon to the Mountain, where they found the Schamir in great abundance.

Now, the Schamir was no larger than a grain of barley. But so powerful was the force of its invisible rays, that, in order to preserve oneself, it was necessary to wrap it up in coverings of wool and to enclose it in a leaden sheath lined with linseed flour. And it was

enough to trace a line on the rock and to place the creature there, and straightway the rocks split silently from top to bottom, and each of the two faces was as smooth as the mirror of a lake.

And now the journeymen were able to take blocks of granite to the mountain, without chisel and hammer. And without scraper or polisher they were able to adjust them, one to another so perfectly, that when the walls were done, not even the keenest eye could detect where they joined. And the iron of war did not defile the House of Peace.

Thus the Temple rose little by little from Mount Moriah. And already at a distance of seven cubits from the levelled summit, he was laying out the plan of his courts and porches and his Holy of Holies.

But as the Temple grew upward toward the sky, in the same measure his builders day by day paled and grew thinner.

Now, the master builder had a son called Jaïr, who was the most zealous of all the workmen. And Solomon, seeing him shrunken and emaciated, was moved with pity. So he sent for him. And, when he was come, the King spake unto him, saying :

" Thou knowest I have preferred thee over all those who work in the building of the Temple. I give thee a double wage and a double provision for thy food. How comes it then, Jaïr, that I see thy bones through the little flesh of thy cheeks ? "

" May it please the king to hearken to his servant," answered Jaïr, " and to come to his help. Every night, when the sun has set, I lay myself down to sleep after the labour of the Temple. Every night a demon

glides towards me in the darkness and sucks my blood from the thumb of my right hand. And every morning, when the sun rises, I awake to go back to my work at the Temple. But each morning a little more of my life is gone, with the blood I have lost. Save me, save me, my Lord the King, or thou wilt have no one left for the building of the Temple but a company of ghosts."

Then Solomon thought within himself: "God hath put the spirits under my power and I made no use of them to keep the Shulamite for myself. But ought I not now to use them that I may keep my men who build the Temple?" And he said to Jaïr:

"Take this ring. When he cometh in the hour of night, throw it at his heart and cry aloud, 'In the name of the Lord, Solomon summons thee.' Then, without listening to his clamour, nor fearing him, see that thou run immediately to me."

Jaïr did even as Solomon had commanded. And lo, the day after, in the dawn, he ran joyously to the king, saying:

"My master, I have done even as thou didst bid me. Behold, I bring thee the demon. He is there in the courtyard, at the gate of thy palace. He weeps and implores me with a loud voice, crying: 'Take back the ring from my heart. Deliver me not unto Solomon! I will reward thee with all the gold that is in the world.'"

At these words Solomon rose up and went into the courtyard, where he found the demon. And the demon trembled for fear.

"What is thy name?" asked the king.

"My name is Ornias. I hold sovereignty over six and thirty evil spirits, who torment the bodies of men in the watches of the night."

" Summon them hither."

And Ornias summoned them. One after the other they appeared, hideous and misshapen. And at Solomon's bidding, each, as he was named, named the ill with which he tortured mankind. There was Ruax, who furrows the forehead, and Barsafael, who racks the head with pain ; Arotosael, who drills the eyes, and Judal who plugs the ears ; Sphendonael, who burns the throat, and Sphandor, who burns the nape of the neck ; Kurtael, who tears asunder the entrails, and Bethel, who breaks the heart. And there were those who hammer the loins and the ribs, and those who saw the knee-joints and the heels, and those who torment with spasms or cramps, abscesses or boils, insomnia or torpor, languor or fever ; and those who hurl hungers and passions, leprosy and plague, delirium and vertigo, frenzy and madness.

Upon each of them in turn, Solomon set his seal, and, suddenly as harmless for others as for themselves, but ravaged in their accursed bodies by the same scourge with which they had afflicted mankind, they rolled at his feet with cries and lamentations. And from that day to the day when the Temple was finished, no man among the builders knew suffering or death.

But when the walls of the Sanctuary were risen even to the height of twelve cubits, behold, they would rise no higher. In vain the Schamir quarried and polished the mountain rock. In vain workman and mason hoisted one block upon another. Each night

undid the labour of the day. And soon the king saw that, just as a ship without sail or mast sinks little by little into the sea, so the unfinished Temple would sink and crumble into the earth.

" Without doubt, this is again the work of demons," thought Solomon. " I let myself be robbed of Abishag's love. But shall I now let them rob the Eternal of his Temple ? "

And, addressing Ornias : " Which of you," he said, " is the culprit ? " " Asmodeus," answered Ornias. " He holdeth sovereignty over three hundred and fifty-three armies of spirits. And he biddeth them destroy that which thou buildest for God."

" Where is he to be found ? "

" In the Mountain of the East, which I shall show thee. There he diggeth a well, and having allowed it to fill with water, he covereth it with a stone. Every day he mounteth into the sky to learn the lesson of the sky. Then he descendeth again to the earth and learneth the lesson of the earth also. At last he cometh again to the mountain, and uncovers the well that he may drink. And so, putting back the stone, he flieth away."

And Solomon commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying :

" Take this ring whereon is graven the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He. And take with thee also certain pieces of wool and two barrels of wine. When thou art come to the Mountain of the East, even to the well which Ornias shall show thee, dig a second well beneath this well ; make the water to run out of the first well into the second, and cover it over with wool. Then dig again, above the first, a third well, and fill it with wine. Asmodeus will come thither

thirsty ; and when he hath drunk of the wine, he will fall asleep, heavy with its fumes. Then must thou set my seal upon him. And behold, when he awaketh, he will follow thee."

And Benaiah did as Solomon had commanded him. And when Asmodeus awoke he would have fled. But Benaiah cried to him, saying : " The Holy Name is upon thee ! The Holy Name is upon thee ! " And behold, he followed after him.

Now, when they came to the town, they passed by a cobbler's booth, and the cobbler was measuring a certain man for a pair of shoes.

" They must last me for seven years," said the man.

Asmodeus burst into mocking laughter. " Wherefore laughest thou ? " demanded Benaiah.

" Because this man, desiring that his shoes live for seven years, knoweth not that he hath himself but seven days to live."

Now, when he went in to Solomon, Asmodeus took a stick. And at the foot of the throne he measured out four cubits on the blue pavement of the floor. Then, pointing to the king with the end of his stick, he cried out : " After his death this king shall rule four cubits only. And alive he would rule the world, over which I am supreme !"

" The Holy Name is upon thee," answered Solomon. " This it is that ruleth over thee and over the world."

And he chained him with chains whereon the Holy Name was graven. Then, at the bidding of Solomon, Asmodeus summoned all the spirits of the earth, of the

air, and those that dwell below the earth, and those who inhabit the waters.

From grotto and gulf, from ravine and precipice, from wood and plain, from river and ocean, from the places of darkness and the places of light, they flocked innumerable. In their colours all hues were mingled. All shapes united in their shapes. Donkeys' ears above the manes of lions ; elephants' trunks under the wings of bats ; vultures' talons in the scales of fish ; feet armed with teeth, and arms with heads. White eyes were set in blue faces above green bellies, and red eyes in yellow faces above black bellies. They who made metal to run in the veins of the abyss were there ; and they who dropped gems into the eyeballs of the deep. They who sowed salt in the furrows of the sea were there, and they who made sap to flow in the roots of trees. They who lighted the lightning on the hearth of the clouds were there, and they who washed the storms against the ramparts of the blue.

One after another, Solomon sealed them with his seal. Then he spake unto them, saying :

" Ye would have hindered the peace of the Lord : now, therefore, shall ye toil for it."

And some he ordered to transport and adjust the blocks of granite : and some to voyage on the paths of the sea, to bring back tall cedars from the forests. And some he made to search in the deep for sapphire for the pavements, for gold for the battlements. And others he put to cast bronze for the pillars and the basin for cleansing. Some were set to prepare incense and balm from the hearts of flowers, and others to weave robes of crimson and curtains of hyacinth, from the soul of the sun.

Then they cried aloud, every one, "At thy service! At thy service, King Solomon!"

And each one received such work as the king appointed. And demons and men worked side by side in building for God.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MASTER OF JUSTICE

Now, while they worked at the Temple in pain and tribulation, the demons bewailed themselves, saying :

" Alas ! alas ! God chastiseth us ! In our pride we cried out on the sixth day of the world, ' We are mightier than man and than the sons of man.' And behold, the son of man is mightier."

But Beelzebub, Prince of the Satans, alone among them all escaped servitude. For he had not yet received the mark of Solomon's seal. For, as our Doctors tell us, it is necessary that Evil be free, for the work of God. So Beelzebub came and went under the sky. And sometimes he visited the work of the demons.

" Which is your share ? " he asked them, one day. And they answered :

" Our share is labour without rest."

" True, ye bear away blocks of stone from the quarry ; but when ye go again thither, go ye not without burden ? "

" We return thither without burden."

" Then do not complain ; ye have your rest."

Now, the wind repeated to Solomon all that Beelzebub had said. And the king gave commandment, saying :

" Ye come laden from the quarries, and laden ye shall return thither."

Another time Beelzebub came to comfort the demons.

" What is your portion ? " he asked them. And they answered :

" Behold, Solomon hath doubled our travail. He taketh from us all that was left of rest."

" But do ye not sleep, then, in the nights ? "

" We sleep at night."

" Then rest is still yours."

And again the wind repeated to Solomon all that Beelzebub had said. And the king gave commandment, saying :

" By day ye labour, and by night ye shall labour also."

Still another time, Beelzebub came to comfort the Satans.

" What is your lot ? " he asked them.

And they recounted to him the increased weariness of their endless drudgery.

" All things have an end," answered Beelzebub. " Bow yourselves now to these insults. By and by ye shall rise up again for vengeance, in the day when ye shall have dominion over him who now constraineth you. And there will be an end of him and of his Temple."

But in spite of God's commands, and in spite of Beelzebub's advice, the most rebellious sometimes mutinied and refused to work. Then angels, armed with flame, seized them and dragged them before the face of Solomon. And seated on his throne in the Hall of the Pillars of Cedar, the king pronounced judgment

on them. Some he condemned to be chained with chains of iron. Others he imprisoned under mountains, or hurled into the whirlpools of the sea. And each was soon reduced to obedience and took up his harsh task again.

Handled by spirits who worked invisibly, the huge stones seemed to hoist themselves one upon the other of their own accord. And, crowning Mount Moriah with a triple crown, little by little the mighty ramparts closed in upon the walls of the Sanctuary, which itself enclosed the Holy of Holies. And all three were overlaid with pure gold, and above them towered the porch to the height of one hundred and twenty cubits.

On the plain of Jordan, however, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredathah, Huram the Tyrian, with skilled artisans from Israel and from the nations, saw to the casting of the metals which the demons brought them. And they fashioned altars and tables and pillars and candlesticks and tripods and lavers.

Now one day, as Solomon, seated upon his throne in the Hall of the Pillars of Cedar, was pronouncing judgment on the Satans, one of the men from the casting presented himself before the king. And a serpent was coiled about his neck :

" Our king, if indeed thou wilt build the Dwelling of His peace for the Lord, is it enough that the law of thy peace rule over demons only ? Wilt thou not also lend thy justice to arbitrate between man and the beast ? "

" What is thy complaint ? " asked the king.

" This is it," answered the man. " Thy wisdom which banished the iron of war from the Temple hath

ordained also that thy servants shall by no means shed blood while they are at work on the House of the Lord. We were anxious to obey thee, and now, through our obedience, we lead the life of beasts rather than of men. Now yesterday, having worked for God all day, I had just milked my cow, and in the evening hour, as I came forth from the stable carrying the milk in a jug, I perceived a serpent in the grass. And the serpent groaned grievously. ' Wherefore dost thou groan ? ' I asked him. And he answered, ' I have a great thirst upon me. What art thou carrying in that jug ? ' ' Milk.' ' Let me drink and I will reveal to thee where a treasure is hid.' I took pity on him. He drank. Then he led me to a place where there lay a great stone. But as I lifted it, and was already about to touch the gold, behold he leapt at my throat and, entwining me in his knots, while his head crept down the length of my body, he shot forth his tongue to bite me in the foot. ' Stealer of treasure, thou shalt die,' he cried. As for me, I begged and supplicated him, saying : ' Let Solomon be judge betwixt us.' He agreed to this, and we are here. Decide between us, then, O my king."

" What is thy case ? " the king asked the serpent.

" His life belongs to me," he answered. " Is it not written, ' Thou shalt bite him in the heel.' "

" First unloose thyself from his neck," replied Solomon. " It is not fitting that one pleader hold the other in his power before the judge's face."

And, when he saw the serpent creeping on the ground, the king said to the man :

" It is also written, ' Thou shalt tread upon his head.' Exercise thy right."

And the man trod upon the head of the serpent with his heel.

The lark, who had heard the judgment pronounced, flew to his wife and warned her : " The king," said he, " is again allowing man to indulge his native cruelty. Take care now, and hide the eggs away from him, lest he see them."

But his wife, far from listening to him, went to lay her eggs in the middle of that very road by which the king was accustomed to pass in his chariot when he went up to inspect the works at the Temple.

" Unhappy bird, what has thou done ? " cried her husband, the lark, " the king will crush the eggs beneath his horses' hooves. And we shall never hear our little ones chirping."

But she answered :

" Solomon is like God. He knoweth justice. But he knoweth also compassion. Why should he destroy these innocent lives ? "

And, in truth, when the wind had reported this conversation to the king, he stopped his chariot, and, especially to spare the eggs of the lark, he went on foot along the right-hand side of the way.

The day after, while he was giving judgment, seated upon the throne in the Hall of the Pillars of Cedar-wood, in token of their gratitude, the lark and his wife, came to present to him a date and a blade of grass. And he caressed their downy heads. And, under his caress, tiny feathers came forth. And it is since that day that the lark wears a crest upon its head.

Thus, by the power of justice and of pity, peace reigned between man and beast. And this is why, in these days, Solomon caused to be made two giant

Cherubim in image work. And he set them upright at the back of the Holy of Holies. And the Cherubim had great wings like birds and horses' hooves. But they wore men's faces.

Now the otter came in his turn to complain to Solomon, saying :

" Is it enough for the peace of the Lord, that peace liveth between man and demon, and between man and beast ? Ought it not also exist between beast and beast ? "

" Who hath wronged thee ? " demanded the king.

The otter answered :

" As I was going to hunt in the stream I entrusted my little ones to the musk-deer, and she swore to me, saying : ' I will guard thy little ones even till thy return.' But, when I returned, the musk-deer had done them to death. Is it not just, lord, that I should seek her punishment ? "

The king sent for the musk-deer and said to her : " Is it thou who hast done to death the young of the otter ? "

" It is even I, lord," answered the musk-deer. " But I heard the woodpecker rapping with his beak the call to battle. And in my haste, as I ran to the combat, I crushed them underfoot. I had no will to do so."

The king summoned the woodpecker, and said to him :

" Is it thou who hast rapped with thy beak a call to battle ? "

" It is even I, lord," replied the woodpecker. " But I had seen the lizard shooting his darts of war."

The king sent for the lizard and said to him :

" Wherefore didst thou shoot thy darts of war ? "

And he answered :

" I had seen the tortoise putting on his armour." Summoned to defend himself, the tortoise explained :

" I saw the crayfish sharpening his spikes." And the crayfish alleged : " I saw the lobster brandishing his spear."

The king sent for the lobster and asked him : " Why hast thou brandished thy spear ? " And he answered : " I saw the otter going down into the stream to devour my little ones."

Then Solomon turned towards the otter and pronounced the sentence :

" The musk-deer is innocent. And thou alone art guilty. The death of thy little ones was but thy punishment. Who soweth war, reapeth war."

And while the king sat in judgment upon the animals the twelve bronze oxen came and placed themselves peacefully at the entrance of the Sanctuary. And three looked towards the east, and three looked towards the west, three looked towards the south, and three towards the north. And they bore on their backs the huge bath into which the priests of the Lord were to descend that they might purify themselves in the water of peace.

But in its turn, the maize came to bring its complaint before Solomon, saying :

" Justice for demons, for men, and for beasts ? Is this enough, then, to build the House of God ? Or ought there not also to be justice among the plants ? The convolvulus and the hemlock are jealous that I

alone am enough to nourish man. And for forty days now we have fought neck to neck in the thickets of the plain."

"He hath wounded me with thorns from the briar!" cried the convolvulus.

"He hath poisoned me with the arrows of the water-plantain," cried the hemlock.

"They have both pierced my cobs with holly daggers," replied the maize.

"Separate yourselves," ordered Solomon, "and henceforth convolvulus shall cling, hemlock shall spread, and maize shall stand upright!"

And, since that day, it is so, and there is no more war between the maize, the convolvulus, and the hemlock.

Now, when the justice of Solomon had made peace between the plants, gold pomegranates came to hang themselves on the capitals of the two pillars that stood at the entry to the Temple. And within the Sanctuary golden gourds mingled with the festoons of golden chains, while golden vines grew upwards from a gold pavement.

The Sanctuary, however, was still unfinished. It lacked a cornerstone, and without this it would certainly fall in. The stone lay, huge and rare, upon the ground. But no force exerted from above or below had power to move it.

And in these days behold a wind began to blow every day from dawn till dusk. And the wind shook the Temple, and it shook the whole world. And spirits and men and beasts and plants cried out with loud voice, lamenting :

" Of what use is thy justice, King Solomon, to us who think and feel, if thou lettest this thing, insensible and witless, destroy us and the Temple and the very world itself? "

Then Solomon called Benaiah his servant, and said unto him :

" Saddle thy camel. Take this empty wine-skin and this ring, and see that thou go, journeying by night, even to the birthplace of this wind. When thou shalt have found it, spread out the skin upon the ground, with the open mouth looking towards the region whence the wind bloweth. And set the ring against the opening, so that the wind shall blow across it. And so soon as thou seest the skin begin to swell with the incoming wind, close the opening, and seal it with my seal. Saddle, then, thy camel, and come again unto me with thy burden."

And Benaiah did in all points according as the king had commanded him. He journeyed from night to night even to the shores of the Red Sea. And he saw that this was the birthplace of the wind. He captured it, as it blew across the ring into the wine-skin, which was the skin of a he-goat, and he sealed it with the seal of Solomon. And he returned, bearing upon his camel the swollen skin, which stood upright on its four feet and raised its head as though it had been alive.

But when he had set it down upon the ground, in the Hall where the king sat enthroned, the skin moved of itself, and took seven steps forward, even to the foot of the throne. And there it bowed its head and kissed the feet of the king.

"By what name shall we name thee, captive wind?" asked Solomon.

"I am called Epiphas," answered the wind. "At the call of the Eternal, I blew upon the sea and opened a path through its waves whereby the Hebrews might cross over in safety."

"Come with me, then," continued Solomon. And the wind, in the wine-skin with the four feet, followed the king to the Temple Square, where the stone lay. And the king said unto him:

"Thou, who openest a path for the feet of the Hebrews, finish now this Temple that shall open a road for their prayers."

And, as he pronounced these words, he broke the seal which held the wine-skin closed. And while the goat-skin collapsed and sank down upon its empty feet, the invisible wind glided under the huge stone, and slowly raised it up. And slowly the wind ensconced it in the yawning angle. And, behold, the Temple was finished.

Then the just peace of Solomon ruled over the Temple as it ruled over all things else upon earth.

CHAPTER IX

PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER

Now, when he had made perfect the Temple, Solomon would have consecrated it to the Eternal. But Shimei the Doctor appeared before him and spoke unto him, saying :

" How wilt thou dedicate the Temple to the Eternal, seeing that thou livest not at all according to his Law? It is written, 'It is not good for man to walk alone,' for God created man in His own image, to the end, that man should create in his turn. Now, therefore, choose thee a wife from among the maidens of Israel, a companion who shall be worthy to bear thy sons."

And those of the Sanhedrin, came likewise and reasoned with him, saying :

" Get thee a wife, King Solomon ; who liveth unwed is the murderer of his unbegotten children."

But Solomon in his heart thought still on the Shulamite and yearned after her. As he wrote much later in his *Proverbs*, " Mayst thou rejoice with the wife of thy youth." And not having won love from the woman whom he loved, behold, he no longer believed in love.

Therefore he answered them, saying :

" I have found one man faithful among a thousand ;

but I have found no woman among ten thousand faithful."

And while they marvelled at his words, the king continued :

" I will prove it to ye. Let the faithfullest husband in all the town be brought before me. For his wife above all others should be true."

They sought this husband. And they brought him before the king. And Solomon said unto him :

" I would honour thee."

" Me ? " answered the man, " me, a servant lowly among thy servants ? "

" Take this blade," pursued the king. " And if to-morrow at dawn thou bringest me the head of thy wife, which thou shalt have smitten off, thou shalt be my Minister over all Israel."

" So be it," agreed the man.

Now, when he was come again to his home, he saw how his wife made game in all her fresh beauty with his two children. And his heart grew heavy within him.

" What ails thee ? " she asked him.

" A certain care torments me : let me be, I prithee." And she brought him to eat. But he could not taste anything.

" Lay the children to sleep," he said, " and thou, lay thee down also."

And when she slept, he drew the sword, came near to the bed, and would have slain her. But, behold, one of his little ones was cradled between her breasts, and the other nestled between her shoulders.

" Unhappy that I am, what is to do ? I cannot slay her unless I slay also my innocent babes." And

he turned away trembling for fear. But a devil in this hour slid into his heart :

" She must die," he thought. " So shall I be set over all Israel by the king."

A second time he drew near and brandished the sword. But the tumbled tresses of his wife spread loose about the pillow and covered the two faces of his little ones. And he turned away his head and wept.

The day after, when Solomon sent for him, and asked : " Well, hast thou slain thy wife," he cried between his sobs, " Nay, lord. For I could not ! "

And, turning towards Shimei the Doctor and those of the Sanhedrin,

" Behold," quoth Solomon, " the man that I have found among a thousand."

He let a week go by. And then he sent for the woman secretly and spoke unto her, questioning :

" Lovest thou thy husband ? "

" Yea, lord. I love him."

" Listen," said the king. "Thy beauty hath filled my eyes. I would make thee my partner, to share my couch and my throne. But thy husband standeth betwixt us."

" What must my lord's handmaid do ? "

" Take this sword ; cut off his head. And to-morrow thou shalt reign over Israel with me."

" So be it," answered the woman.

And when she was come again to the place where she lodged she prepared the board as for a festival.

" Crown of my forehead, thought of my thought," she cried to her husband. " Come, let us eat, let us

drink, let us drown our souls in the joy of wine, let us mingle our bodies in the raptures of the night ! "

He drank. He was overcome by the heady fumes of the wine. And as he slept a heavy sleep she flourished the sword that was to cut off his head. Now Solomon in his wisdom had given her but a sword of tin. Nevertheless, the man felt it upon his neck, started awake, and guessed everything.

" I had pity upon her," he said to the king on the morrow, " but she had no pity upon me."

And Solomon showed her to Shimei and to those of the Sanhedrin. And he laughed, and said, " Behold the woman among ten thousand that I have not found ! "

Now, Bathsheba, the mother of the king, was warned of these things by Shimei. And she presented herself before him, and having made obeisance, she spake unto him, saying :

" Will the lord, my son, then remain unwed ? Doth he purpose to leave no heir to the crown of his father, David ? "

" Nay, my mother ; but since I no longer seek a woman who shall please my heart, I have made choice of one who shall bring good fortune to my people."

" Knoweth thy handmaid of what father is this maiden of thy choice, my son ? "

" She is a king's daughter."

" There is no other king but Solomon in Israel."

" The father of her whom I have chosen is king in a strange land."

" Shall the wife of Solomon be a woman out of a strange people, my son ? With what tainted blood,

then, wouldst thou mingle the blood of David? And what blessing from God dost thou look for on such a union? Abraham sent his servant Eliezer to seek in a far country a daughter of Israel who should mate with Isaac. And thou, who art encompassed around by daughters of Israel, wilt thou go into the distance seeking a strange woman? My child, my child, put not thy faith in the stranger. Her lips drop as an honeycomb and her mouth is smoother than oil. But such honey grows bitter as wormwood, and her mouth turns sharper than the blade of a two-edged sword. Such an one will not walk with thee in the paths of thy life. Her roads go up into death and come down again unto it. For the stranger woman is an idolater, and the idolater knoweth not the Eternal God."

"If the idolater indeed knoweth not the Eternal God, should we not therefore bring her acquainted with Him? And if the nations rest strangers to Israel, how shall the God of Israel be also the God of the nations? And just as Abraham long ago sent Eliezer into the land of Aram to seek the daughter of Bethel for Isaac, so have I sent Benaiah into the land of Egypt seeking for my sake the daughter of Vaphres."

"An Egyptian?" cried the Sanhedrin.

"An Egyptian?" cried Shimei the Doctor. "She whose ancestors bowed thy ancestors beneath the yoke of slavery? She whose name is an abomination to thy race? She whose father even now goeth up to arm armies against thee, armies that thine army ought utterly to destroy for the glory of the Lord!"

"How shall I dedicate the House of Peace to the Lord if I do not establish peace between me and mine enemy? And how may I better make peace to

flourish between us than by taking his daughter in marriage and becoming his son ? "

" Innocent ! Dost thou forget the snares of the flesh ! Art thou not yet aware of the sin that lieth in wait for thee, of lust that is ambushed in the heart of this madman's dream ? O King Solomon, King Solomon, thou whom I instructed in wisdom and the ways of wisdom, is this that wisdom that I taught thee ? "

" Thou taughtest me, saying : ' The voice of the fool shall be known by his many words.' "

" Have a care, King Solomon. Saul also was king. And the Prophet Samuel took back his royalty from him, for the sake of David. Have a care. The horn of oil which emptied itself to anoint thy forehead may very well to-morrow be filled again for the head of another ! "

Then said Solomon :

" I know thee, Shimei, my master. Thou art always he who stoned my father. But thou thyself taughtest me, saying, ' Upon him who throweth a stone, the same stone shall fall again.' And again. ' He who unlooseth discord, the same chaineth himself to death.' "

And the king remembered the dying counsels of David. And he delivered Shimei into the hands of the headsman. And the headsman put him to death. But, when Shimei had ceased to live, in the fevers of sleeplessness Solomon cried out on the ghost of his master :

" Shimei, Shimei, my master ! Did I kill thee to keep the peace, or to keep my kingdom ? "

But Nagsara, the daughter of Pharaoh, went down

out of Egypt in a chariot of silver drawn by horses whose harness was of scarlet plumage. And slaves followed after her, bearing powders and perfumes and unguents. And Nagsara, the daughter of Pharaoh, came up into Jerusalem by the Gate of the Fountain. And, as she went in by the gate, behold, the Archangel Michael descended from the sky and flew to the distant sea. And on its shores he planted a reed. And, behold, round about this reed the mud gathered day by day. And after many days the heaped-up mud became a land, and the land in time grew into a town. And this town was called Rome, and Rome was the scourge of Israel to chastise her.

CHAPTER X

THE GOING IN OF THE ARK

Now, the Temple, when it was finished, shone in the hour of evening like a golden hill set upon a silver mountain.

In the court, the altar of bronze increased that it might embrace the earth, the bath grew deeper that it might hold the waters of the sea. On the threshold the warp and woof of the curtains caught the hyacinthine shadows of the air. Under the ceiling, the candlestick lighted the purples of flame. And the Cherubim waited with coupled wings until the Holy Ark, which was to be conducted hither into the Holy of Holies, in the next dawn, should sanctify the Sanctuary, and, like a new world, bind the old world to God.

And multitudes thronged upon the slopes of Mount Moriah. Some had come out of Golan forsaking her fertile waters, some had come down from Gilead, leaving their flocks, some had quitted lake Chinnereth and the fish. Some abandoned the River Jordan, where the water tumbles and rushes, or the Dead Sea, where the waters lie salt and still. Others left blue Galilee, evergreen Carmel, Gilgal's blanched oasis, or Sharon's rosy plains. They came from Jericho, where the palm trees bear honey-sweet fruit ; they came from Sodom, where the apple trees drop fruit bitter as ashes ;

from Hebron, honeycombed with caves and from Beersheba that burrows into the wilderness.

And they came, leading sheep and ewes, she-goats and young kids, bullocks and kine. And they came bearing corn and barley, pomegranates and grapes, figs and olives. They brought, every man according to his substance. And that they might offer their offerings in the Temple, they awaited the hour of dawn, when Solomon, escorting the Ark, should himself make offering of the Temple to the Eternal. And they were joyful, and mingling their joy with the blessed night, they sang the songs of David :

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord.

For thither the tribes go up, according to the Covenant of Israel, to glorify the name of the Eternal.

For this is the place that He hath chosen, the rock where He hath set His Name.

Now while the soul of Israel, at the Temple doors, drew near to God, Solomon in his palace made a feast in honour of his nuptials with the daughter of Pharaoh. For he desired in his own person to unite Israel to the nations.

And before conducting her with flare of torches, in a palanquin of cedarwood, through the town, he had made her forswear her animal-headed idols. For he desired to set upon the lips of the Egyptian the words of the Torah, and to plant the love of God in her heart.

But, when they were both reclining at the festive board, Nagsara said to her husband :

" Will not my lord be pleased to hearken with his

handmaid to the voice of the instruments that sing in my country? That the voice may gather me back for a space to the river that I have quitted, even to my mother and my sisters, dear to my heart."

Then the Egyptian slaves entered. And they were painted beneath their veils from head to foot, one with ochre, another with carmine, others with cinnabar or azure. And they bore harps and lutes, flutes and viols, cymbals and tabors. With their mouths they blew into the wood; their fingers ran up and down the strings; with their fists they struck the resounding parchment.

Now, far away in the perfumed air of distant Egypt, along the alleys bordered by the Sphinx, at the foot of the obelisks and pyramids, beneath the pillars crowned with the lotus, and the ceilings peopled with painted figures, each of these viols and these tabors, each one of these flutes and these cymbals, these lutes and these harps, had wept or sung a thousand times. A thousand times they had grated or hissed, murmured or resounded for the Bull Apis or the Cow Hâthor, for Apôpi the Serpent or for Bonû the Leopard, for Ra and for Thot, and for Sobkhû and Sibû, and for the thousand idols of the Egyptians. And the absent idols pressed and surged about them as if of their own accord. And Solomon, as he lay beside Nagsara, felt them crying with beastly voice in his veins. And behold this cry ascended up to God among the voices of the Hebrews. And in its going it defiled their songs of joy and praise.

With a trembling hand, the king hid under his purple pillow the golden key of the Temple, with

which on the morrow at dawn he should open the Holy Gates.

But when he had mingled his flesh with the flesh of the stranger, behold he slept. And the Egyptian slaves, as Nagsara had bidden them, came softly and stretched above his couch silks dark as ebony, whereon broideries of precious stones sparkled. And the stuff was like to a sky. And the precious stones shone as they had been stars. And this sky and these stars made the semblance of a night.

But the Hebrews, thronging upon the slopes of Mount Moriah, sang unto the Eternal :

Praise the Lord, for He is mighty, for His godness endureth for ever. For He hath chosen Jacob into Himself and Israel for His peculiar treasure.

Who smote the first-born of Egypt, both of man and of beast. Who sent tokens of wonders into the midst of thee, O Egypt, upon Pharaoh and upon all his servants.

For He opened the sea and made our fathers in bondage to pass through the midst of it. And, lo, He will open the Temple, even to their enfranchised sons.

And dawn went up the sky of God. But above the couch, where Solomon slept, the sky of ebony silk broidered with precious stones prolonged the night.

Now the hour was already gone by when the king, with the princes of the tribes, should have gone to seek the Holy Ark in the City of David. And behold the princes waited among their servants and their banners. And they were robed in precious robes that shone with sapphire or opal or amethyst, topaz or onyx or agate, with jasper or chrysolite, with emerald or chrysoprase, with carbuncles and with diamonds.

And no one among them dared awaken the king. Nevertheless, Benaiah, his servant, went near to his door and knocked.

Solomon's head rested upon the shoulder of Nagsara. And he raised his eyelids. But, seeing above him a dark, starry sky, he closed them again. And, behold the princes went up to the City of David without the king.

Now the hour was already past when Solomon, with the sons of Kohath should have borne the Holy Ark to Mount Moriah. And they attended Solomon. And they were girded, every man, in tunics of fine linen. Behind them, the sons of Aaron, with the Gershonites and the Merarites, held manna and the sacred oil, the brazen serpent, and the rod whereon the seventy names of the Lord were written. And before them, under his mitre adorned with pomegranates and his flower-embroidered robe Zadok the High Priest also attended Solomon.

No one dared to disturb the king. Nevertheless, the eldest among his brethren, Chileab, the son of Abigail, drew near to the door and called aloud.

Solomon's head rested upon the breast of Nagsara. And he raised his eyelids. But, seeing stars still in the ebony coloured sky, he closed them again. And the sons of Kohath bore the Holy Ark to Mount Moriah without the king.

Now the hour was already past when Solomon should have sent up to God the smoke of the first sacrifice. On the altar the wood was heaped. On the wood lay the victim with its throat already cut.

Round about it the princes of the tribes, with the sons of Aaron and those of Gershon and Merar, with the manna and the holy oil and the brazen serpent waited also. And the rod, whereon the seventy names of the Lord were written, waited. And the Holy Ark waited upon the shoulders of the sons of Kohath, and Zadok the High Priest blessed it with outspread hands. And beyond the heaven of clouds and the sunlit heaven, beyond the heaven of the angels and the archangels, beyond the heaven of justice and the heaven of pity, the Eternal waited also.

Then Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, thought in her heart :

" Instruct man in goodness and thou shalt increase his knowledge. Instruct a wise man and he will become wiser."

And, going in to her son, she snatched away the false night from above his couch and showed him the day. And she spoke with him, saying :

" Is this thy wisdom, Solomon, that knoweth not light from darkness ? Thou seekest God. Must God, then, send thy mother to search for thee ? Thou wouldst build a Temple. Must she take the key and herself open the door, that the Eternal may go in ? Oh, my son, child of my womb, what prayers have I not prayed for thee ! Spend not thy strength, then, on follies that corrupt a king, for the wisdom of woman buildeth up thy house, but her folly plucketh it down."

And Solomon knew his fault. And he thought : " Fool, who hath despised the lessons of his mother."

And he arose and did put on the royal mantle and the royal crown. And after he had bowed himself humbly at the feet of Bathsheba he went up into Mount

Moriah that he might there bow himself down before the Eternal.

When he appeared, the Levites took their psalteries and they chanted a psalm :

Blessed is everyone that feareth the Lord, that walketh in His ways.
The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion ; and He shall make thee to taste the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life.
Yea, thou shalt see thy children and thy children's children. Peace be to Israel.

Then with the same flame that the Most High had sent down formerly upon the altar erected by Moses, with the same flame that had followed the Tabernacle from the wilderness to Shiloh, and from Nob to Gibeon, the son of David set fire to the wood beneath the victim. And while the smoke, like the trunk of a mighty pine-tree, went upwards until it brushed the firmament with its crest, the prayer of Solomon mounted still higher than that and brushed the heart of the Eternal :

" Thou hast fulfilled," he said, " King of the World, that which Thou spakest to David Thy servant.

" And now, behold, the House that Thou hast deigned to permit his son to build for Thy glory standeth upright and complete. The splendour of Thy Presence henceforth shall stay no longer beneath the moving veil. But she shall inhabit under lasting rock and eternal gold, in the City of Thy choice, even in the House of Thy choice.

" But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth ? Behold heaven and the heaven of heavens

cannot contain Thee ; how much less this place that I have builded ?

" Nevertheless, Thou mayst, perchance, dwell there, since already Thou dwellest there. For unto this place didst thou hurl the rock of salvation in the dawn of the first day. And on that rock the universe was founded by Thy hand.

" Now, therefore, Lord, let Thy blessing descend upon Thy Temple, and let it penetrate even to the stone where the heart of Adam, once again, beginneth to beat. And in Thy peace let Thy blessing knit together those scattered limbs that sin hath put asunder, so that he may rise again into the innocence of Eden. For so man upon earth shall be one, even as Thou art One in the heaven."

And when he had thus spoken he looked upon the bearers of the Ark, and signed to them a sign. And within the Ark were hidden the two tables upon which Moses had engraved his Covenant with the Eternal. And Solomon turned the golden key in the golden lock of the Sanctuary, and cried aloud :

" Throw wide thy gateways ! that the King of Glory may go in to His rest ! "

But, from the tombs where his bones were falling into corruption, the voice of David rose weeping :

" Lord before whom I lived for repentance, and before whom in death I still repent me, hast Thou not sworn that in the hour when the gates of Thy House open to thee upon Mount Moriah, in that same hour, the whole world should see my sins forgiven ? "

Then the Lord called to mind His oath. And while

the bearers who bore the Ark before the open gates already trod the threshold with their bare feet, behold, the Ark of a sudden increased mightily. And the Ark would by no means go in.

Then Solomon spoke again, saying :

" Throw wide thy gateways ! that the King of Glory may go in to His rest."

And the priests sounded the horn. And the Levites made lute and harp and cymbal to resound. And all cried aloud after him, repeating :

" Throw wide thy gateways ! that the King of Glory may go in to His rest."

But the Ark would by no means go in. And it increased still more mightily.

Then Solomon bethought him of his tardiness and of his unexpiated sin. And he cried aloud :

" For David's sake, and for the sake of his repentance, increase the span of thy gate, and raise thy lintels ! that the King of Glory may at last go in to His rest."

And while David smiled in his tomb, the doorways of God, that would not open except to the repentant, widened even to the horizons and raised their lintels even to the sky. And, behold, the Ark of its own accord quitted the shoulders of the bearers. And, borne upon the shoulders of the air, the Ark went in alone unto the Holy of Holies.

Now when the Ark was in place there, beneath the spreading wings of the two Cherubim, behold, from out the golden grapes that were planted upon the golden floor of the Sanctuary, divine blood ran even into the heart of Adam. And the limbs of man,

scattered abroad in the world, felt Adam's heart beating more strongly. And, in order that they might live again, they strove to join themselves, one with another, so that once again one man only should inhabit the world.

CHAPTER XI

THE GOLD OF THE PROVERBS

Now it came to pass when he had made offering of the Temple to the Eternal, the son of David went down again into Gibeon. And a second time he beheld the Lord in a vision of the night. And the Lord spake unto him and said :

" I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication that thou hast made before Me.

" I have hallowed this House which thou hast built Me that My name may reign there for ever.

" And My eyes shall be open perpetually, and My ears attentive to the prayers that go up from thence.

" If thou walkest not in My ways, and still, being repentant, comest into this House imploring My presence, behold, I will hearken to thy voice from the height of heaven and I will pardon thee, for thy repentance sake.

" And if, by the transgression of My people, the doors of the clouds are shut up and there is no rain, if there be famine in the land, if there be pestilence, blasting mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar ; if a plague come upon men or upon their beasts, yet if Israel repent and come up into this House, imploring My presence, I will hear their voices from the height of heaven and will pardon them for their repentance sake.

" Moreover, concerning a stranger that is not of

My people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for My name's sake, to adore Me in My Sanctuary, unto him also will I hearken from the height of heaven, and I will grant all the desire of his heart. For the Temple that Israel has builded Me is a House for the prayers of all nations.

" But, if ye turn away from My laws and My commandments, and if ye deny the Lord of your salvation and prostrate yourselves in lasciviousness and in blood at the feet of strange gods, behold I will pluck up by the roots My Temple from My people. And I will tear away My people from My Temple and I will scatter them like chaff beneath the face of the sky. And their limbs shall perish in corruption, scattered like those of Adam, whose heart shall fall again into rottenness and cease to beat.

" Reign, then, according to the wisdom that I have given thee, King Solomon. And continue to build peace for the love of man, with that wisdom that builded the Temple for the love of God."

And in these days Solomon reigned in wisdom over Israel. And his wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the East, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Darda and Heman, and Kalkol the sons of Mahol. And he was mightier in wisdom than Joseph and Abraham and Adam. And he taught his wisdom to the children of Israel. And, from all countries under the sun, the children of the nations came together that they might learn his wisdom.

Now, on a day, three brethren came among others

from distant lands to consult the king. The first had no taste for food of any kind. The second prospered in none of his affairs. And the third had a wife who gave him no peace.

" Go into the forest," he said to the first.

" Rise with the dawn," he said to the second.

" Watch the blacksmith," he said to the last.

When they left the palace, thinking that the king had been making game of their bad luck, they joked among themselves, and rallied each other on the answers each had received.

But in a little while the eldest changed his tune :

" Let us follow his counsel," he thought, " who knows what may befall us ?"

So he went his way into the forest. The wood-cutters had just struck down a tree so heavy that they could not hoist it on to their wagon. He lent them a hand and worked so hard that his whole body was bathed in sweat. When he returned to the place where he lodged he ate bread. And this bread seemed to him more delicate than the rarest viands imaginable.

The second brother took heart when he saw the success of the first. And he rose every morning before the sun to ponder and plan his enterprises. And henceforth all went well with him also.

The youngest, at last, betook himself to the forge, where he noticed. that the hardest iron, growing supple in the flames took every shape that the hammer demanded. In the same way, he suppled his wife in the fire of his tenderness and of his severity. And he lived from that time in peace and harmony with her.

Another time, three other brethren from the tribes

of Israel came, asking instruction of Solomon. He promised it to them. But in order to prove their worth, he demanded that they should enter his service in exchange. The brethren agreed to this, and thus three years went by in the palace.

At the end of that time, one of them said to the others :

" Behold it is now three years since we left our wives to learn wisdom. And we have learnt nothing. Let us return therefore to our own homes."

They presented themselves before Solomon that they might gain leave to depart. And when they had bowed themselves before him, he commanded three hundred gold pieces to be brought in, and he said to them :

" Each of ye shall receive either one hundred pieces of gold from my hand or three counsels from my mouth. Choose as ye will."

They discussed one with the other, and at length chose the gold, took it, and went their way. But scarcely had they set foot upon the road when the youngest stopped short.

" We take back gold," said he to his brothers. " But was it for gold that we came hither ? Let us return, ask audience of the king again, render to him his gold, and carry away instead his counsels."

The other two laughed at him. And while his brothers pursued their journey he returned alone to the king.

" I will take back my hundred pieces of gold," said Solomon to him, with a smile. " And here are my three counsels : Pitch thy camp always before night ; never ford a river when the waters are in flood ; and

do not surrender thy secret to any woman, not though she be thine own."

The man thanked him, mounted his horse again, and rode off to rejoin his brothers.

Towards evening they came on a place suitable for pitching a camp. And he said to his brothers :

" Behold, here are trees for our shelter, and grass and water for our beasts. Let us pass the night here. And, if God protect us, we may go on our way in the dawn."

" Stay here ? " they cried. " We can yet travel for three hours more. Thou hast bartered thy gold for wisdom, but this is folly thou hast received in exchange."

And they went on their way. Left alone, he cut wood, made a fire and a hut of leafy branches, fed and watered his horse, ate, drank, and lay down to sleep.

On the morrow, when he had climbed the mountain, he found his brothers again. But both of them lay dead of cold in this region of rocks and snow. He wept for them and buried their bodies. Then, taking their gold with him, he descended into the valley.

The noonday sun found him on the banks of the river. And the waters, swollen by melted snows from the hills, overflowed their banks.

" Why dost thou hesitate to cross over ? " cried the two servants of Solomon, who were conveying the sacks of gold on horseback.

" I wait until the waters run less deep. Imitate my prudence, for it is that of the king."

Being by no means willing to listen to him, they tried to cross, and were drowned and their horses with them. But the man pitched camp for three days,

and when the river was fordable again he crossed over, and, taking the sacks of gold which he found tied upon the backs of the dead horses, he came again to his own tribe, after a long journey.

His brothers' wives questioned him, saying :

" Where hast thou left our husbands ? "

" They are learning wisdom," he answered.

But, with the gold that he had brought back, he bought fields and vineyards, built houses, and fulfilled all the desires of his heart.

" Where hast thou gotten this fortune ? " demanded his wife. And, at first faithful to the third counsel of the king as he had been to the two others, he kept silence. But when she had insisted day by day, month by month, coaxing him with caresses or tiring his patience with her tantrums, at length he gave up his secret. But ill fortune overtook him immediately, for she cried on the morrow, in the midst of a quarrel :

" Is it not enough that thou hast slain thy two brothers ? Wilt thou kill me also, like them ? "

The two widows heard this and ran immediately to the palace of Solomon imploring him for justice. But, when he had been dragged before the king, the man reminded him of his story and of the three counsels that he had preferred to the hundred pieces of gold.

" Go in peace," Solomon said to him. " My counsels have saved thee. For the wisdom of Solomon is more precious than gold."

Now, when he had heard tell of this tale, an old ragged man, father of twelve children, came and threw himself at the feet of the king. In his shaking

right hand he held a bag of wool, empty, dirty, and in holes. Solomon would have thrown alms into it.

"No, no, my lord," cried the old man; "throw into it only one word from thy lips."

And the king bent down to him, and murmured into the bag the word "Wisdom."

The old man went his way, carrying upon his back the bag which had suddenly grown heavy. He washed it in a well. And behold the well was straightway filled with fish. He dried it upon a rock. And, lo, the rock was straightway covered over with fragrant dates. And the old man sustained himself with wisdom every day, and even to the hour of his death he fed his children from it.

Now it was in these days that Solomon began to dictate to his scribe Elihoreph, his *Proverbs*. And in them he taught that idleness is to the soul as smoke is to the eyes; that fear falleth into the snare which it flees; that he who talketh much cannot avoid sin; that he who resisteth anger shall be set among the heroes; that pride goeth before a fall. And in them he taught that a man must not narrow the boundaries of a meadow, nor encroach upon the field of the orphan; that false weight and false measure are an abomination to the Eternal, that truth must be bought, but not sold again; that the punishment of the fool is his own folly; and the reward of the sage, his own wisdom.

And these *Proverbs* grew to the number of eight hundred. And Solomon wrote them down that we might taste the language of clear sense and learn these reasonable lessons, and know piety and cherish

justice. For so he hoped that the simple might learn subtlety, the wicked man goodness, the child experience, the young man discretion, woman constancy, and old age resignation.

Now, one day, as Solomon was sitting in a room in his palace, working at these sayings and wishing with all his heart to better the hearts of mankind, he heard a pigeon talking to his wife outside the lattice of the window. And the pigeon said :

" What is this Temple of Solomon, after all ? If I wished, with one stroke of my beak I could overthrow it."

The king leaned out of the window, called the boaster to him, and asked :

" How darest thou entertain these notions ? "

" I was talking to my wife," answered the bird. " With women, you know, one has to boast ! "

Solomon laughed. But he made the bird swear that he would never talk thus again. The pigeon promised, and flew back to his wife, who at once questioned him :

" What did the king want ? "

" He was afraid that I was going to overthrow the Temple, as I said."

And Solomon thought in his heart : " I cannot change the boastfulness of this pigeon. How, then, shall I change the foolishness of men ? "

CHAPTER XII

THE KEY OF KNOWLEDGE

Now when he had finished the Temple, Solomon looked upon the four stones of the ring that was on his finger. And he said in his heart :

" I have chosen wisdom. Shall I then keep power also ? I enslaved the demons that they might build his Sanctuary for God. And, behold, the Sanctuary is builded. Ought I not, then, to deliver them out of their bondage ? But if I deliver them out of their bondage, what will become of the peace of the world and the beauty of the world ? No. The Satans must even remain my slaves. And my power shall tear their secrets from them. For how shall I have wisdom, having not knowledge ? "

The king raised the ring to the skies. And he summoned the Satans, one after another. And one after another he questioned them.

Asmodeus answered him again, saying : " We are the fallen angels. From time to time we essay to mount up again, even to the Lord. But we may not attain him wholly. And, behold, when we fall again, mortals see a star fall also down the heavens."

And Ornias answered him, saying : " Each one of us is subject to an angel or a star, to a charm or to a magic word. Whoever knoweth this star or this angel,

this word or this charm, is master of us and of our powers."

And Tephras, who lights fire in the dog-star; and Bulbas, who puts the equinoctial tides in flood; and Barak, who blows in the storm; and Kippaon, who freezes in the ice; Shekris, who growls in drunkenness; Mammon, who mumbles in riches; Onoskelis, who cries in lust; Klothod, who howls in murder; Harpax and Metathiax, Anoster and Alleborith, Jeropael and Kunetael, and they who twist the sinews or the limbs, they who seal up the ears and the eyes, they who haunt nightmares or the fever, they who inhabit the marrow or the brain—all these, one after the other, revealed to Solomon by what invocations and talismans, by what incantations and spells, by what conjurations and by what pentacles they might be summoned or chased away, expelled or conquered.

But Solomon was not content only to question the spirits. He demanded of the beasts also. And nothing of what they knew was hidden from him. For God had given him to understand the cry of all four-footed things; the hiss of the serpent, the chirping of birds, the hum of insects. And he knew all that they said. And of the fish, who were dumb, he knew the signs. And of each of them he demanded the place of his birth, the habits of his life, the lessons that experience had taught him.

The twelve animals that shone in the Zodiac instructed him in the influence of the constellations. While the eagle taught him the movements of the sun. And the crane expounded the turning of the seasons. He

learnt how the cock foretells the dawn, and the swallow rain ; how the owl discovers day lurking in midnight ; [1] how the hoopoe knows where water lies hidden under the earth, how the elephant makes his ivory, the viper his venom, the bee his honey, and the oyster his pearl.

The trees and the grasses imparted also unto him their mysteries. And stones and jewels discovered theirs. He learnt to know the fruits that nourish, and those that poison ; the juices that revive life when it droops, and the saps that kill, the blending of minerals to precipitate gold, the lucky rays of the crystal.

And for this reason he undertook to discourse upon the virtues of stones ; and on vegetables, from the tall cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that climbs along the wall. And upon reptiles and fish he spake also, and upon birds, and the spirits that dwell aloft, and they that inhabit the deeps. And, putting down his discoveries upon parchment, he began to cast in hieroglyphs that *Key of Solomon* which is able to open the treasures of all experience, and can force their secrets from all magical arts. For Solomon desired that all mankind should have part in his knowledge ; and he desired this, that sharing his knowledge they might also share his power. And, from all regions of the earth, rich and poor, beggar and king, came to consult with him. For his science appeased the sorrows of the heart, as his skill cured all bodily suffering.

Now in these days a certain king dwelt in Chaldea. And he was exceeding rich in provinces, in fortresses, and in soldiers. And he shone in glory and in goodness.

[1] Here Monsieur Fleg has exactly the sense of Keats's famous line, "There is a budding morrow in midnight."

But he worshipped fire and the stars. Now this king was weak and ill and decrepit, for he had lived already one hundred and twenty years. And during his sleepless nights he tormented himself because he had begotten no son of his body.

One day, when he was seated upon his throne, surrounded by his Ministers and his servants, one of them entered and, bowing low before him, presented his son. Then the king envied him in his heart. And he thought : " How happy is this man ! As for me, I shall die to-morrow. A stranger shall have my kingdom and my throne. And I shall leave nothing of me behind whereby I may be remembered."

And he came down from his throne, and, flinging himself upon the ground, he wept bitterly.

Now Touiah, his counsellor, when he had dismissed the assembly, kissed the shadow of the king that lay before him. And he asked him the cause of his affliction. But the king made no answer.

" Lord," said Touiah to him, " I am thy faithful slave, who hath watched over thee since thy first hour. Confide in me, then, what hath so grieved thee."

But the king wept again and would by no means make answer.

" O my king," went on Touiah, " if indeed thou wilt not tell me the cause of thy sorrow, behold I will kill myself before thy face. For I prefer death to the sight of thy suffering."

Then the king raised his head and looked at him. And he told Touiah what it was that tormented him.

" O my master," answered Touiah, " I am older than thee by an hundred years, and like thee I am childless. But I have heard tell of the glory of

Solomon, who reigneth in wisdom upon the throne of David his father. His God is a mighty God. And he himself is wise with exceeding wisdom. Together they work great marvels. Is it pleasing to my master to send thy servant to him furnished with rich gifts? Perchance, through his knowledge and his God he may be able to fulfil the desires of our hearts."

The king agreed to this. And Touiah departed, taking with him twelve tables of ivory and of ebony, one hundred vases of silver and of gold, and a thousand ornaments of ruby. But, when he had prostrated himself before the face of Solomon, the son of David prevented him from pronouncing his request. For, in a vision of the night, the Eternal had told him of it beforehand.

" Thou bringest me, I know," said Solomon, " on the part of thy master, twelve tables of ivory and of ebony, one hundred vases of silver and gold, and a thousand ornaments of ruby. I accept them from him, but I give them again to thee. And thou art come to demand of me how each of ye, before he die, may know the joy of begetting a son."

And Touiah marvelled, and answered : " Great king, only the heart of my king and mine own heart knew the purpose of this, my journey. Who, then, hath revealed it unto thee ? "

" The Eternal, my God, and the God of Israel, from whom nothing is hidden."

" This God, then, is greater and more powerful than our gods ! "

" Worship Him. And He will fulfil thy desires out of my mouth."

And when Touiah had offered up his prayers to the Lord and had received into his heart the word of the Torah, Solomon said to him :

" When thou shalt be come again unto thy master, go ye together to the bank of the river. And go up, both of ye, into the seventh willow tree that thou countest. And wait in silence. By and by, in the hour between the two prayers, when noonday heat lieth heavy upon the land, come down from the tree and watch. Ye shall see two serpents crawling towards you, one with the face of a monkey, the other with the face of a demon. Kill them with your arrows, cut off their tails and their heads, have their flesh cooked, and give your wives to eat of it. And behold, each of them shall bear her husband a son."

Touiah hastened joyfully back to his king, who received the word of the Torah into his heart, and offered up prayers to the Lord. Then, equipped with bows and arrows, they went up, both of them, into the tree that Solomon had chosen ; and, at the appointed hour, they came down again and perceived the two serpents.

" They are adorned with collars of gold," cried the king. " Do not let us kill them. Let us take them alive rather. We will imprison them in prisons of crystal, so that we may rejoice our eyes with the sight of them."

" O my master," replied Touiah, " the Eternal designed them for nobler usage than that. Let fly thy arrow at this one and I will strike at the other. For their death shall draw the sting from our own death."

And, behold, when their wives had eaten of the flesh of the serpents, each one of them brought into the world a son, according to the prophecy of Solomon.

And, living again in their sons, Touiah and his king awaited death with serene hearts.

Thus King Solomon acquired knowledge from jewels and beasts and spirits. And thus generously he poured it out again upon men.

Now, on a day, while he was at work annotating for men what he had learnt, he heard the hoopoe crying beneath his window. He rose and looked out. And he saw the hoopoe taken in a snare that a child had set for him :

" Alas, poor hoopoe," he cried to him, " thou canst see water where it lurketh hidden beneath the earth. And canst thou not see the snare that lieth in wait for thee on the earth ? "

" Alas," answered the hoopoe, " I can see what earth hideth, but what is hidden in destiny I may not see."

And Solomon set him free. And he thought in his heart :

" This bird's knowledge cannot change his fate. How shall my knowledge, then, change the fate of men ? "

CHAPTER XIII

THE WAY OF RICHES

Faithful to his promise, on the altar before the porch, Solomon offered up burnt offerings to the Lord, according to the laws laid down by Moses for the daily sacrifices, the sacrifices of the Sabbath, of the New Moon, and of the Three Feasts which come, one after another, along the year ; to wit, the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

But Nagsara, his wife, the daughter of Pharaoh, made comparison of the splendour of the Temple with David's dwelling that Solomon inhabited. And she remembered her father's palace, with its lotus-topped pillars, its galleries with painted walls, and the Sphinx on the river-bank. And she spake unto her husband, saying : " Seven long years thou hast been building a House for thy God. Wilt thou now, like a poor man, be content to dwell in a hovel ? " And he answered :

" Better poverty with wisdom, than riches without understanding."

But Nagsara importuned him afresh : " If thou hast no need of a palace for thyself, at least let the daughter of Pharaoh be housed as befits a Pharaoh."

Then he considered within himself : " Perchance

my wife should not abide in the house of David, King of Israel. For the places are become holy, whereunto the Ark of God hath come."

And he builded a palace for Nagsara.

But the beasts, who had joyously helped both demons and men to build the Sanctuary, were idle in this work that they must do to please the whim of the stranger.

And the elephant came, making complaint to Solomon :

" I am the king of animals," said he, " yet thou constrainest me to bear burdens upon my back."

The king summoned the camel, and said to her, " Henceforth thou shalt bear the burdens of the elephant."

But the camel excused herself, alleging that she furnished milk for the workmen to drink. The cow, invited in her turn, refused also, pretending that she furnished the milk that Solomon himself drank.

And, at last, it was the ass to whom he gave command :

" Thou shalt bear the burdens."

During long and tedious days the ass laboured ; then, broken with fatigue, she said to the cow : " I am weary unto death of this toil, yet dare I not complain to the king. Advise me therefore how I may best rid me of this task."

" I will advise thee," replied the cow, " but betray me not, lest Solomon chastise me. This is what thou must do. When the driver of beasts cometh in the dawn to fetch thee, feign sickness and lie still."

Now Solomon had surprised the counsel given by the

cow. On the morrow the driver of beasts came to inform the king that the ass still slept, overcome by some strange sickness.

" Let the cow work in his stead."

" But the milk for my lord the king ? "

" The king will drink camels' milk."

During long and tedious days the cow worked. Then, broken with fatigue, she said to the ass : " I gave thee friendly counsel ; do thou now be friendly also and succour me. Have pity on my sufferings and take back thy task."

But the ass pretended not to hear, and, to give herself the better semblance of sleep, she contrived to keep her long ears from twitching.

During longer and more tedious days the cow laboured again. Then, foundered at last, she lowed in the stable :

" I heard King Solomon commanding the driver of beasts : ' If the ass do not waken to-morrow, put her to death.' "

Then the ass, in her terror, arose and sadly took up again her task. But each time that she met the cow she gave vent to her rage by kicking viciously.

And thus it was that Solomon, who had sealed peace between all animals, now began to sow new discord among them to please the whim of a stranger.

Now, when the dwelling for Nagsara was finished, and when they had ornamented it with rare carpets and sculptured images of trees and animals so cunningly wrought that they seemed to breathe and move, behold, the king made comparison between

this splendour and his own humble palace. And he thought in his heart :

" Verily it is a fine thing to devote oneself to the Eternal ? But doth He exact that one devote oneself alone to Him ? He hath bestowed goods upon me ; ought I not to pleasure myself in them, so that I may worship Him even in the goods He hath bestowed upon me ? Is it a wise man's dream to remain only a wise man ? And shall I be less wise having the wisdom to enjoy riches and keep wisdom also ? "

And, in his turn, he built a dwelling for himself. But, while he had taken seven years to erect the House of the Lord, he took thirteen to build his own.

At the foundations he put enormous blocks of stone. And some measured eight cubits and others ten cubits. He made the courtyard to be surrounded by three walls of marble and one of cedarwood overlaid with gold. And he made the building to stand an hundred cubits in length, fifty cubits broad, and thirty cubits high. And before it he put a porch thirty cubits wide and fifty cubits long. And this he overlaid with gold, even from one extreme to the other. And this golden palace was so peopled with columns of gold that they called it the Forest of Lebanon. But this forest was a forest of gold.

Nevertheless, when the eye of Solomon had seen his palace, his palace was not enough for him. For the eye, like the deep, is insatiable. And he planted orchards and vineyards about it, and gardens for sweet essences, and he laid out herb gardens for aromatic spices. And he dug canals and reservoirs of water that he might besprinkle both mountain and plain. And

he added field to field, plough to plough, and oxen to oxen.

Then he considered within himself, saying :

" Wherefore should I not also possess horses ? Verily David, my father, forbade them to me, according to the will of the Eternal : ' Store not up chariots nor horses, for these lead to war.' But may I not possess them for peace, seeing that I possess them at all only for their beauty ? "

And he sent merchants into Egypt. And these brought back to him teams for harnessing, and coursers, such as were purchased for the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram. And he had four thousand stalls for the team horses, for harnessing, and he had fourteen hundred chariots and twenty thousand horsemen.

Then, in order that his treasuries might never be drained dry, he levied tribute of gold each year from the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, and from all the peoples that his father David had yoked in bondage. And at Ezion-geber, which is beside Eloth, in the land of Edom, he caused a navy to be built by his demons. And his ships, manned by skilled shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, brought home to him every year, from Ophir and Tarshish, ingots of gold, and of gems, ivory, and sandalwood, more than might be counted. And the king made diamonds to be in Jerusalem as the pebbles of the wayside for abundance.

But he remained wise in the midst of his riches. And he mingled merriment with his wisdom.

Now in these days one of his farmers came before

him to make complaint. " One of my neighbours hath stolen my geese," he groaned ; " and I can by no means discover the thief."

Solomon summoned all the farmers to the Temple, and remonstrated with them thus :

" One of ye hath stolen his neighbour's geese," he said to them. " He is even now within the Temple, and I know the man. Goose feathers cling yet to his head."

At these words the guilty man raised his hand to his forehead. For he wished to brush away the proofs of his guilt unperceived.

" Behold the thief," cried the king. " Seize him."

Another day came seven brethren to consult with him about their inheritance. Now six of them were made like other men. But the seventh had two heads. And, pretending to count as two people, he claimed a double share of their father's fortune.

" If one of thy heads knoweth not what the other thinketh," said the king to him, " in verity thou art two persons."

And he had linen bandages brought and an ewer of boiling water. They bandaged the man's four eyes. And over one of the two heads they poured the hot water.

" We are but one : we are but one," cried the other head.

And the inheritance was fairly divided into seven portions.

Now this same wisdom, that did not abandon Solomon in the midst of his wealth, prevented him also from deserting the way of the Lord.

Above all the treasures that he had gathered together and made his own, he preferred his horses.

And he had builded for their races an amphitheatre seven parasangs in breadth and twelve parasangs in length. And sometimes in this huge arena, alone or with one of his servants, it pleased him to watch them trot past, equipped with their golden harness. And he would caress them, stroking one at the roots of his mane, another between his nostrils. But, when the hour of prayer came, abruptly he left them and went in again to God.

Now one evening he was galloping in the arena, mounted on one of the loveliest of his beasts. And the gold-shod horses raised a cloud of golden dust from the golden sand. Suddenly he read in the setting of the sun that the hour of prayer was gone over. And he leapt from the saddle, and, waiting not even to see the stallion led back to the stable, he ran to the Temple, he and his servant with him. And they implored pardon of the Eternal.

But the eye is as insatiable as the pit. When the eye of Solomon had seen his amphitheatre and his palace, his palace and his amphitheatre no longer satisfied him. Accordingly he divided Jerusalem, by twelve marble ramparts, into twelve marble districts. And this he did for those of the twelve tribes that inhabit the city.

Then, in all the lands of his dominion he built, in marble, store cities, and chariot cities, and cities of the horsemen. And he raised marble fortresses at Hazor, at Megiddo, and Gezer ; at Baalath, at Beth-Horon the Upper and Beth-Horon the Nether, and

in all the country of Yaman and in the country of Lebanon, even unto Tadmor in the wilderness.

And on the walls of these cities and fortresses of marble he had image-work graven in sculpture in the semblance of angels and saints, of heroes and of prophets, of four-footed things and birds. And he wrought them in gold and in silver, in bronze and agate, and in crystal. And to the end that these citadels and these towns might be united, one with another, and that all of them should be in continual union with Jerusalem, he digged roads. And he paved his roads with basalt.

But the men who had joyfully helped beast and demon to work for the glory of the Creator, soon grew mutinous and sullen when they must work endlessly for the glory of His creature.

"Are we slaves," they muttered, "or are we Hebrews? Moses our Master opened a path through the waves for our fathers? Was it to the end that we should draw stones and bake bricks even as they?"

And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an overseer of the labourers, went sometimes to make supplication to the king, saying:

"My lord yoketh his servants under too heavy a yoke."

But Solomon would not listen to him. For the way of riches leadeth to blindness. And the men scowled among themselves:

"This wise king of ours, shall he become the pitiless king foretold by Samuel the seer? He hath taken our weariness for his building. Will he now take from us

our fields for his nourishment? Our sons for his armies? Our daughters for his pleasure?"

And Jeroboam the son of Nebat went again before the face of Solomon. And he spoke again unto him, imploring:

"Let my lord the king be softer to his people. Too great labour nourisheth revolt."

But far from hearkening to him, Solomon commanded that he be seized and put in chains. And Jeroboam fled into a far country, fearing his wrath.

Now this was that same Jeroboam whose forehead Ahijah the prophet anointed much later with oil. And he snatched away ten tribes of Israel from Rehoboam the son of Solomon. And he tore his kingdom in sunder.

Thus it was that, after he had taught peace to men as he had to the beasts, Solomon began to teach them discord again, even as he had the beasts. For the way of riches leadeth to ruin, and the road of wealth goeth down into perdition.

CHAPTER XIV

THE THRONE OF THE EARTH

Now, when he heard that Hadad the Edomite and Hadadezer the King of Zobah were envious in their hearts of his riches, and plotted war against him, Solomon said :

" For peace I allied myself through marriage with the Pharaoh of Egypt. And for peace now I will ally myself through marriage with all the seventy kings of the earth. For, in this my reign, the children of Israel live each man, from Dan unto Beer-Sheba, under his own vine and his own fig-tree. And I will that the sons of the nations also, during my sovereignty, shall live in the shadow of my peace, from the west unto the east, even from the south unto the north."

Accordingly, he dispatched the spirits his servants across leagues of space, bidding to his side the seventy kings of the earth. And from the countries of the rain, and those of blue skies, from sunny countries and countries of the snow, they came one and all. And each of them conducted hither to Solomon her who was fairest among his daughters. And the maidens came pale as narcissus or swarthy as ebony, with cheeks smooth as the olive or ruddy as the ripe pomegranate. And behind them long trains of servants came bearing their richest treasure-sacks and ingots of gold, vases.

balances, arms and armour, veils and furs, feathers and perfumes, corals and rare shells.

And, when they drew near to the city, behold, Solomon had ranged the creatures subject to his empire on either side of the road. To the right-hand were all the animals of forest and plain, of valley and mountain ; and to the left-hand, all the spirits of the earth and the waters, the fire and the air. And when they had looked upon this double wall that stretched before them, and when they had seen the colours and the manes, the talons and the fangs, the claws and the tentacles, the snouts and muzzles and jaws, sneering faces and saturnine faces, the kings and their escorts shivered for fear, and would by no means continue on the way. But Benaiah, the servant of Solomon, said to them :

" The power of my master's hand hath them enchained."

Then, plucking up heart again, they advanced toward the city. And between the tamed beasts and the silent demons they went up slowly toward the city of marble, while all the birds of the air flew above them with interlocking wings. And they spread a heaven above them, feathered with a thousand plumages. And there was diversity of cries and of song, of chirping and of warbling.

On a sudden they beheld the glory of Solomon, and every man prostrated himself in homage. And Solomon sat no longer upon the throne of his father David, in the Hall of the Pillars of Cedarwood. He was seated now in the porch with its columns of gold, on a new throne which the demons had builded for him in the likeness of the Throne on High.

And this throne was of ivory, inset with pearls and with flaming jewels. And because there are six vast heavens hanging between man and the seventh heaven of God, there were, between the foreheads of the kings and the feet of Solomon, six great steps. And, upon each of these steps, images of metal regarded each other face to face. On the step of iron were the bull of iron and the lion of iron ; on the step of brass were the panther of brass and the ram of brass ; on the step of lead were the leaden sheep and the leaden wolf ; on the step of bronze were the bronze bear and the bronze gazelle. On the step of copper were the copper ass and the copper elephant ; on the step of silver, the silver griffin and the silver phœnix ; and upon the top step of gold, between the golden sparrow-hawk and the golden dove, Solomon sat enthroned. At his knee, between the demon of gold and the golden man, the gold serpent coiled. Above his head, between the ark with the golden Cherubim and the candlestick of the golden stars, the gold eagle poised in flight. And round about him, gold fruit hung from the boughs of golden palm-trees. And golden essences ran out of them. And higher even than the palm trees hung transparent veils of byssus and crimson, and hyacinth and scarlet. And their iridescence shone in rays and in firmaments.

And Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, kneeled before him on his throne. And she said unto him :

" Behold, the desires and ambitions of thy mother's heart are fulfilled, Solomon. Thou art the King-Messiah. Thou art the King-Messiah."

During seventy days and seventy nights, taking to

wife turn by turn their daughters, Solomon feasted the seventy kings.

Each morning, on the altar before the Sanctuary, he sacrificed a thousand bulls for each of them, and ten thousand sheep for the daughter of each. And with the smoke of the burnt offerings he made to rise up this song of supplication for them :

Eternal, God of Israel, receive into Thy peace this new wife and this new father whom I make kneel before Thy face, for the sake of peace. That in them a new people shall venerate Thee from generation to generation. That by them a new nation shall adore Thee as long as the sun giveth forth light. That they who inhabit the wilderness may know Thee. That Thy name be spoken by the peoples of distant islands. That in peace all the kings of the earth may be united in Thee. That all mankind in peace may be united with Thee also. And that Thou shalt be One upon earth, as Thou art One in the sky."

Thus he prayed. And after the prayer of the sacrifice, each day, at the hour of noon, in honour of the new bride and the new father, Solomon made festival. For his kitchens the demons had dug in the valley a vat as huge as a lake. And upon the mountain they had lighted a brazier as high as a hill. And they dived into the deeps of the seas to procure fish without number, and they flew to the ends of the earth, to cull aromatic herbs and spices for the seasoning. But sheep and kine and deer and kid came of themselves bearing their flesh to the knife. And of themselves birds from the four horizons roasted themselves upon the spits. And fruit from all climates fell of their own will into the baskets.

And the tables, spread in the open, were to the number of four thousand. And the tables of the demons were of stone, and those of the poor men of

wood. And the table of the princes and the kings were of crystal, and those of the doctors, the Levites, and the priests of carbuncle. And Solomon, with his new father and his new bride ate and drank from a tripod of diamond. But every mouth ate joyfully of the same viands, and every man drank of the same wine. And behold all hearts were filled to overflowing with happiness.

Every evening, when the feasting was done, the steps of the amphitheatre received a mighty concourse of people. And they were all grouped according to the colours of the four seasons ; the kings of the nations with their servants were clad in green ; the tribes of Israel in red ; the people of Jerusalem in white ; and the Levites, the priests, and the doctors in blue.

And at either end of the amphitheatre, and on either side, giant pillars stood. And these pillars were of jasper and porphyry and alabaster and lapis, signifying the colours of the four horizons. And stretched between the summits of these four pillars was a fine net, of mesh so delicate that no eye might see it. But from it the pearls of a milky way and the brilliants of the twelve constellations which the net carried, shone out when the shadows descended upon the sand of the arena.

And at Solomon's desire, in order that heaven itself might descend upon the earth, seven chariots, hued like the seven wandering stars, drawn by coursers with mains of lightning, and driven by charioteers with sparkling hair, traced twelve times, with the revolutions of their radiant wheels, the milky way

and the signs of the constellations upon the sand beneath them.

And at nightfall, within the city and without it, every living being, man and woman, old and young, the child and the grandfather, lighted a torch. And every man of the nations, and every man of Israel, they of Jerusalem, and of the Sanhedrin, doctors, Levites, priests, ancients, princes, and kings formed in procession. And thus went they all twelve times about the twelve marble ramparts. And behold it was as a winding river of light. And they escorted King Solomon and his new bride, even to the threshold of the nuptial couch.

But on the morning of the seventieth day, Solomon made sacrifice for all the kings of the seventy nations at one time. And at noon on the seventieth day he feasted all the throng of the seventy nations together. And in the evening of the seventieth day he traced the stars in the dust for all the angels of the seventy nations together. And in the night of the seventieth day, when the river of darkness had extinguished his river of light, he lay in the arms of the seventy princesses, his wives. And behold he was the husband of seventy nations at once.

Now on the morrow, in the hour of dawn, the seventy kings attended in the Porch of the Golden Pillars that they might receive their dismissal from King Solomon. He appeared, and, by the magic of certain engines that the demons controlled, he ascended the huge steps of his throne.

The lion of iron cried : " Excellent are the precepts

of the Eternal." And, joining his paw to the hoof of the iron bull, they raised the king on to the iron step. Then the panther of brass cried : " Pure are the commandments of the Eternal," and, joining his paw with that of the ram of brass, they raised the king on to the step of brass. And the leaden wolf cried : " Just are the judgments of the Eternal," and he offered his paw to the leaden sheep. And they raised the king to the step of lead. Then the bronze bear cried : " Holy is the truth of the Eternal," and, joining his paw to that of the bronze gazelle, they raised the king on to the bronze step. Then the copper elephant cried : " Sweet is the power of the Eternal," and, joining his paw with the hoof of the copper ass, they raised the king up to the step of copper. And the silver griffin cried : " Strong is the mercy of the Eternal," and linking his wing with the wing of the silver phœnix, they raised the king on to the silver step. And last, the golden sparrow-hawk cried : " Perfect is the wisdom of the Eternal," and, linking his wing with the wing of the golden dove, they bore the king up to the step of gold.

Then the golden man put into the hand of Solomon a golden sceptre. The golden eagle set upon his head a crown of gold. And, flying into the summits of the air, the gold demon tore from the sky a pavement of sapphire, and set it below his feet in front of the serpent of gold. And the two golden Cherubim opened the golden ark and unrolled upon his knees the golden rolls of the Torah, crying : " Eternal is the Law of the Eternal." And all the animals that were imaged in metal bellowed and roared and lowed, and howled and barked and yelped and brayed and

bleated and trumpeted and cooed and hissed. And all, in their several tongues, cried aloud : " Eternal is the Law of the Eternal. Nourish thy soul with it each day."

But Solomon, in the pride of his heart, thought :

" Why should I have need of the Torah ? Am I not the King-Messiah ? Is it not thanks to me that the sheep lieth down by her sister the wolf, that the gazelle is friendly to the bear, and the dove is the beloved of the sparrow-hawk ? Have I not turned spears into reaping-hooks and swords into ploughshares ? And upon the heads of mountains have I not piled a mountain, even the House of the Eternal ? These peoples and these kings, have they not gone up thither, saying : ' Let us arise and go up into the mountain of Solomon, for he will show us his paths and instruct us in his ways. For the judgment that his lips and his mouth utter is even the word of the Lord' ? What need have I, then, of the Law, seeing I have wisdom ? "

Now Adam groaned within himself in the deeps :

" I suffer ! I am tormented ! What will become of the ring on thy finger, Solomon, that shone upon mine, in the sunshine of the first days ? Once, to keep wisdom, thou didst flee from power. And now, behold, thy wisdom fleeth before thy power. Thinkest thou to build the peace of the world by magic, and by lust to reknit mankind. Dost thou hope, by imitating God, to become God—and thinkest thou that, without the Law of God, even God is God. Do not lose utterly, as I before thee lost mine, the Eden God hath given thee. Do not divide again from him, that which I have divided. I suffer ! I am tortured ! Already my heart

beateth less strongly, the heart whose beating thy prayer awakened. And the blood runneth less swiftly in my veins, that the golden vines of thy Sanctuary have poured into them. And once again my limbs begin to disjoin and to scatter over the world, which for one instant, through the peace of thy Temple, were made whole and one. Solomon, Solomon, remember Adam. Slay not, for the second time, man, who might have been restored by thee."

But Solomon hearkened not. For the seventy kings of the nations bowed themselves to the ground, in the shadow of his throne. And they cried aloud, " Glory to Solomon. He is God upon Earth, as God is King in the Heaven."

CHAPTER XV

THE CARPET OF THE AIR

Now when the kings of the seventy nations had betaken themselves every man into his own country again, King Solomon said in his heart :

" Since I am King of the Earth, wherefore should I not go about my kingdom to visit it ? "

And he gave ordinance to the spirits that they should weave him a carpet of emerald silk, shot with gold. And its measurements were ten thousand cubits in breadth and ten thousand cubits in length. And when they had completed it, they spread it upon the ground before the gates of Jerusalem. And Solomon commanded them to set upon it his throne of ivory, his couch of purple, tables and vessels of gold, huge kettles and giant spits from his kitchens, jars of oil, skins of wine, sacks of wheat, and pitchers by thousands. And there were kine in their stalls, and sheep in pens, and horses in their stables, and all the retinue of his servants, both men, beasts, and demons. Then, seating himself upon the throne, and raising the four stones of his ring to the sky, he cried :

" Bear me whither I would go, winds of the air."

And straightway the winds blew. And the breath of the wind raised the vast carpet from the earth, and stood under it, even as four invisible pillars. And,

like another plain mounting above the plain, the green surface of the carpet took the transparent air. And while Solomon and his multitudes, borne through the empty spaces of the air, beheld the marble city fleeing beneath them, all the birds of the air flew above his throne, with interlocked wings. And they made a flying canopy of shade for him. Because they would shield the eyes of the king from the sun.

And so swift was the magic journey that the hills skipped like lambs and the mountains leapt like rams, the deserts were changed into lakes, the rivers held back their courses, and the cities sank their ramparts and their towers, even to the level of the ground.

Now when he had passed, hovering, over the borders of Israel, behold King Solomon, from the heights of the air, was aware of a voice of lamentation going up.

" God of Abraham," groaned the voice, " when wilt Thou be merciful and grant me to die ? "

With his sceptre he made a sign. The birds of the winged vault let their wings fall apart. And like a gigantic drill, that pierced the air seven times as it swept down in seven spirals, the errant plain came slowly to rest upon the plain beneath.

" God of Abraham, God of Abraham," repeated the voice, " Thou who hast accorded me to live till I am become a patriarch, wilt Thou not now accord me to die ? "

Drawing near, the king beheld an ancient man, with a countenance so deathly and limbs so trembling that he seemed a rotting tree uprooted by the wind.

" What age art thou, old man ? " said Solomon.

" I counted my years, even to the number of three hundred. Since then I no longer know how to count."

" How hast thou attained to this age, which since the death of Abraham hath not been known ? "

" I prayed the Lord that He would vouchsafe me to see, before I die, the most powerful king upon earth."

" Die in peace, then. For thou hast seen him," answered Solomon.

As the king pronounced these words the old man gave up his ghost. And the king buried him, and re-ascended his throne. And he rose up again into the air.

Now the earth, as our ancients tell, is like a great shield set upon the sea. The Temple rises in the centre, at the highest point. A circle surrounds it. And this circle is the land of Israel. Seven other circles surround this circle, each one larger than the last, as they go down to the rim. And the rim itself, which is the extreme circle, is on the edge of the waters. Moreover, each of these circles is divided into ten kingdoms. And in order to visit all the seventy kingdoms, it is necessary to round the earth seven times.

And Solomon saw first the region of Thebel where they plant and they sow, and where flourish seven several kinds of wheat. And here also is the wealth of Tyre, of Sidon, and of Damascus, the treasure of Nineveh, of Assyria, and of Babel, the pomps of Ophir, and Tarshish, the splendours of Chaldea, and the magnificence of Egypt. Then he traversed the ten kingdoms of the region of Tzia, where is but little sowing and planting. For here men seek well-springs everlastingly, for their ground is a barren ground.

Then he traversed the ten kingdoms of the region of Neschia, whose inhabitants are dwarfs. And these people are without noses, and they breathe through two holes in their skull. Then he scanned the land of Ga, which is peopled by magicians, who fashion gold and gems ; then the land of Arka. And these people are descended from Cain. And here the stars and the constellations are still visible. But in the land of Adama, beyond it in a light less visible,[1] live the children of those who were engendered by Adam during the hundred and thirty years of his sin. And these dwell with demon-women, and know not happiness. At last he came to the circle of Eretz, whither the first man had been banished after his expulsion from Paradise. And this was a region of cold and darkness.

And, at each one of the new marvels that he discovered, Solomon raised his hands to heaven and cried aloud :

" How marvellous are Thy works, Lord. Thou hast created all things with wisdom. And, lo, the world is filled with Thy beneficence."

Now, when he approached the outer rim of the region of darkness upon his flying carpet, he perceived, with his eyes that saw in the night, a deep valley which was filled with a sombre-looking city. And thereto he descended.

The black inhabitants of this black city had a king as men have, and they lived in houses, wore clothing, and ate like food with men. But, when he had scrutinised their black faces more nearly, Solomon knew that these seeming men were apes.

[1] Milton's " No light ; but rather darkness visible," exactly renders the French.

" How comes it," he asked of their king, " that, being animals, ye comport yourselves like men ? "

" Once on a time our ancestors were men," replied the king of the apes. " They were one family among the families of Israel. But, in spite of the Lord's teaching and the reprimands of his prophets, they turned aside from the Torah, and would no longer walk in its ways. Thus, stained with blasphemy, theft and false promises, with lust and covetousness, they disgraced man in their shape and God in their soul. And this is why the Eternal banished them to the extreme confines of darkness, where neither the light of day nor the radiance of His Law, penetrate ever. For He said : ' Where the Torah endeth, endeth mankind.' "

But Solomon thought in the pride of his heart :

" Who ceaseth to be man may also become God."

And he mounted his throne, and ascended again into the air.

Now, on the way back, he retraced his course over Eretz, Adama, Arka, Ga with its magicians, Neschia with its dwarfs, barren Tzia, and wealthy Thebel. And he no longer took pleasure in these places when he found them again, for the world, with no more mysteries in store, seemed to him to have lost its beauty.

It was then that he uttered for the first time the words which much later he repeated in his *Ecclesiastes*, saying :

" What thing can mine eyes see that they have not already seen ? The sun cometh and the sun goeth, turning towards the north, turning towards the south,

and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind also turneth. And he whirleth about continually, and returneth, according to his circuits. All the streams run into the sea, yet the sea is not full ; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. All things are full of labour. The eye is tired with seeing. The thing that hath been it is that which shall be. And there is nothing new under the sun."

But as he approached and hovered over the borders of Israel, he thought :

" Nothing new under the sun ? A fig for that ! I dwell in the land where the Eternal dwelleth. I am enthroned upon the throne where the Eternal is throned. If the world seem too old and stale for me, am I not mighty in power ? And shall I not, therefore, renew and refresh it ? "

Now, while he pondered these thoughts in his heart, from the heights of the air he perceived in a chasm between two precipitous mountains, a valley. And all over the surface of the valley swarmed an army of ants. And, notwithstanding the distance, he heard the queen of the ants cry to her people : " Retire speedily into your caverns." For she had perceived him in her turn.

He descended, and would have questioned her. But she said :

" I will not answer thy questions unless thou first place me upon thy hand."

He took her up and set her gently upon his hand, and asked her :

" Wherefore fearest thou me, queen of the ants ? "

" I fear no one but God," she answered.

" Then why, when thou didst behold me flying in the air, didst thou command thy ants to run with all speed and hide themselves in their caves ? "

" I did not desire that in looking on thee they should even for an instant forget their Creator."

" Thou knowest me, who I am ? "

" Thou art King Solomon."

" The earth is my footstool. I traverse the sky like a thought of God. Knowest thou anyone in the world like unto me in greatness ? "

" Myself," said the ant.

" Thou ? "

" The earth supports the air," she replied. " The air bears thy carpet : thy carpet carries thy throne : thy throne bears thee ; and thou supportest thy hand. But thy hand supports me."

He laughed so heartily that the echoes filled the air. Then he said :

" Come with me to my palace. And thou shalt see my power."

And King Solomon, borne by his throne, which bore his carpet, which was borne by the air that the earth bore, carried the queen of the ants upon his hand, even to the doors of his palace.

CHAPTER XVI

MAN'S UTTERMOST BORDER

Now, when she had admired the palace of the king, his parks and his fountains, his tables and his feasts, the queen of the ants spoke to Solomon, saying :

" Since thou art thus powerful, King Solomon, canst thou, for a day, feed all the beasts of the air and of the earth and of the waters ? "

" Of a truth can I," answered the king.

" Then begin by feeding the fish," she added. " After that, we shall see."

So, raising the four stones of his ring to the sky, Solomon commanded the spirits to load with corn the backs of one hundred thousand times a hundred thousand camels, and to lead them down to the shore. And, when they had come down to it, he cried :

" Come and eat, all ye dwellers in the sea." And in multitudes the fish shone to the surface and snatched the corn which Solomon threw them. Then they dived down again, surfeited, and darkened into the shadows of the deep.

But, behold, a whale surged above the water with her great maw open. And it was as high as a mountain and as deep as a volcano.

" Feed her," cried the king to his spirits. And the demons emptied sacks by myriads into that living whirlpool. So that rivers of wheat flowed therein.

Now, when not a single grain was left, the whale still roared aloud, crying :

" I am hungry ; I am hungry. Give me to eat, King Solomon."

And Solomon asked her :

" Are there other fish in the sea like unto thee ? "

And she answered : " In the sea there are seventy thousand sorts of fish like unto me. But the least among them is so huge that my body in his belly would take up no more place than a grain of corn in mine ! "

Then the ant cried out : " Praise God, who hath nourished thy mighty flesh ! "

And the king fell on his knees and implored the Eternal. " Pardon me, God, the All-powerful."

Solomon had had a daughter by Nagsara, and she was as fair as her mother, and much wiser.

Now, one day, Nabal, the grandson of Shimei, who was rich in the Torah, but poor in worldly goods, begged audience of the king. And he said unto him :

" Behold, I love Phasgah, the daughter of my lord the king. Is it my lord the king's pleasure that, with the grace of God, she become my wife."

But the king took his prayer for an outrage. And he banished the grandson of Shimei out of the land of Israel.

On the morrow, Phasgah appeared before him :

" Nabal is my beloved. For God turned his heart towards mine," she sighed. " Unless he become my husband, of a surety I shall die."

And she fell upon her knees before the throne and wept. And the queen of the ants said to Solomon :

" Since thou art so powerful, King Solomon, canst

thou hinder love from uniting these twain who are lovers ? "

" Of a truth can I," answered he.

And he raised the four stones of his ring to the heavens and commanded his demons, saying :

" Build me an high tower in the midst of the ocean. And let Phasgah, my daughter, be immured therein."

And, behold, they built the tower and immured the maiden. And seventy archers kept guard over her.

Now, on a night, as Nabal wandered by mountains and streams, under snow and wind, he could find no other shelter in all the plain, from weariness and cold, than the carcass of a cow that lay dead upon the grass. And, while he slept beneath his roof of bones, behold, a griffin stooped from the sky, seized the carcass in his talons, and, flying through the air until dawn, he put it down at last, with Nabal, whom it sheltered, on top of the tower where the captive Phasgah watched the uprising of the sun and wept.

She gave a cry of fear. But presently, knowing her lover again, she leaned over him and wakened him with tears of joy and led him into a chamber where she bathed him in perfumes and clothed him in rich stuffs. Then, calling two angels as witnesses and drawing twelve drops of blood from his own veins, and twelve drops of blood from the veins of Phasgah, Nabal inscribed their marriage contract. And they signed it, both of them, and the two angels likewise. And beneath the eye of the Eternal they were united in love.

On the morrow, as Solomon sat enthroned upon his throne in the Porch of the Columns of Gold, the

griffin appeared, and, folding his wings, he alighted by the king, and with his beak gave the contract into the hand of the king, where the ant queen was throned.

" Praise be to God, who joineth souls in marriage," she cried.

And Solomon implored : " Almighty God, pardon me."

In the evening of that same day Solomon was dictating to his scribe, Elihoreph, the new *Proverbs*, which he had pondered. On a sudden, as he dictated, he saw, above the scribe, the angel of death, who scowled at him, with drawn sword.

" Since thou art so powerful, King Solomon," said the queen of the ants to him, " canst thou snatch this man from death ? "

" Of a truth can I," replied the king.

And, raising the four stones of his ring to the heavens, he cried to his demons :

" Transport my scribe, Elihoreph, into the upper air."

The scribe took wing with the demons. But the instant after, the angel of death, who had followed them, reappeared. And this time he smiled.

" Wherefore smilest thou ? " asked Solomon.

" I render thanks," answered the angel. " God commanded me to slay thy scribe, Elihoreph. But He bade me by no means touch him upon the earth. I was wrath, for I knew not what to do. And thou hast sent him into the air expressly for my need."

Then the ant exclaimed :

" God be praised, who slayeth and giveth life."

Then she added :

" If thy wisdom is no more than thy power, King Solomon, thy wisdom is not of much account."

And, leaving her throne upon the hand of the king, the queen of the ants returned to her own throne among the ants.

CHAPTER XVII

THE PALACE IN THE SAND

Now all the kings of the earth knew of King Solomon's wisdom. And they sent messengers from all parts to ask him riddles and enigmas. And always the wisdom of Solomon knew how to read them.

And first Hiram, King of Tyre, had sent to ask him :

" What thing is it that liveth and yet moveth not. Yet being dead, it moveth ? " And he made answer :

" The tree. For, dead, it becometh a ship."

And after him, Vaphres, King of Egypt, sent to ask him :

" What thing is that which liveth and hath but one voice. Yet, being dead, it hath seven." And he made answer.

" The ibis. For when he is dead, his sinews give seven voices to the harp."

And after him, Assurirbi, King of Assyria, sent to demand of him :

" What man is he that had no mother, and yet is buried in his mother's womb ? "

And he made answer :

" Adam. For he sprang from earth. And earth received him again."

And all marvelled at his answers. But since the queen of the ants had shown him the limits of his

power, he began already to see the bounds of his wisdom. And he said in his heart :

" I have questioned stones, plants, and beasts. I have questioned men and spirits. They have taught me their secrets. I have judged judgments and I have unriddled riddles. But have I been able to change that which is established ? Have I discovered the things that are secret ? How were the measurements of the earth designed, and how is it set upon its axis ? Upon what are founded these foundations, and whence was the corner stone launched ? By what bolts were the doors of the sea bolted ? And what doors threw open the roads of light ? Where were the treasures of the snow amassed ? And the granaries of darkness, how were they filled ? Have I beheld these things before life barred me in ? Beyond the gates of death shall mine eyes see them ? Behold, I have found the shadow of wisdom in place of wisdom. But where wisdom abideth, and where she hath her dwelling, what man knoweth ? "

And of all those kings whose riddles he had solved he made question :

" What is the home of wisdom ? Where may a man find her ? "

But this riddle no one could solve, any better than himself.

One day he said :

"Wisdom dwelleth, perchance, in the sky."

Now he could not ascend high enough on his carpet of the air. Wherefore he commanded his demons to make a mighty wheel, whose spokes were longer than the rays of the sun. And the demons made

it revolve upon a gigantic axle. And Solomon bade them bind him to the huge rim. And he mounted up into space.

After twelve times thirty days and twelve times thirty nights, he arrived at the highest height of the air, where the rebel angels, Azzael and Azzah, were suspended.

" Go down, go down, King Solomon," they cried, " who goeth higher than this shall surely die."

He asked them :

" Wisdom, what is her abode, and where may a man find her ? "

But they answered :

" Go down, go down. We have heard tell of her. But she is not here. God alone knoweth her way and her abode."

Then said he : " Perchance she abideth in the deep."

And he bade the demons twist a rope of crystal. And the rope was longer than time, and stronger than death. And at the end of this rope, in a crystal cage, he plunged into the whirlpools of the ocean. After twelve times thirty days and twelve times thirty nights, when he had traversed waters and waters, and again waters, he arrived at the very depths of the deep, where Leviathan lay enchained.

" Go up, go up, King Solomon. No man descendeth lower and liveth."

" Wisdom, where is her abode ? " demanded the king. " How may a man find her ? "

" Go up, go up, King Solomon," answered Leviathan. " I have indeed heard tell of her, but she is not

here. God alone hath seen her path and knoweth her lodging."

Then he said : " Perchance she is upon the earth."

And again, on his carpet of the winds he journeyed seven times through the seven regions that he had traversed before. For he sought upon earth the abode of wisdom.

After days and days, from his lofty height, behold he discerned in the golden sands of a desert, a building of gold. He descended. It was a palace with terraces. And, going round about it to find the entry, he could not. Then he spoke unto Asmodeus, prince of the demons, saying :

" Let thy spirits go up into all the terraces that they may discover if an entry is hidden there."

They discovered nothing. But at length they came upon an old eagle whose nest was upon the first terrace. And they brought him to Solomon.

" What is thy age, old eagle ? " asked Solomon.

" Seven hundred years."

" Knowest thou where is the entry to this palace ? "

" By thy life and mine," replied the eagle, " I do not know it. But I have a brother, much older than myself, who nests upon the second terrace. Perchance he may know that which I know not."

Accordingly the demons sought for the second eagle, who was larger than the first.

" What is thy age, old eagle ? " Solomon demanded of him.

" Nine hundred years."

" Knowest thou where is the entry to this palace ? "

" By my life and thine, I do not know it," answered the eagle. " But I have a brother, much older than myself, who nests upon the third terrace. Perchance he may know that which I know not."

Accordingly the demons sought for the third eagle. He was larger than the second, and so ancient that he could no longer fly, and the spirits bore him upon their wings.

" What is thy age, old eagle ? " asked Solomon.

" Thirteen hundred years."

" Knowest thou where is the entry to this palace ? "

" As God liveth," answered the eagle, " I have never seen it. But I have heard my father, at the end of his days, say that his father, at the end of his days, had told him that his father, when he was young had seen the door of the palace on the side over against the setting sun. But the centuries have hidden it from mortal eye, in the sands of the desert and the sands of time."

Then Solomon cried to the spirits of the winds :

" Blow upon the centuries, and upon the desert ; bring out the door of the palace from the oblivion of time."

And the winds blew. And, all about the palace of gold, the golden sand rose in a golden storm. And when at length upon the desert the clouds of gold rain sank down again, behold, in the western wall, the door appeared.

It was of iron burnt by rust and by the years. And above the lock these words were written :

" If thou art not king, let us sleep. If thou art, the key in the crystal box will lead thee to our slumbers."

And Solomon broke the crystal. And he took the key.

Now, when he had opened the iron door, he saw a golden door, then a second golden door, and then a third. And, upon the lintel of the third, he read :

" Howsoever wise thou art, yet learn wisdom."

And when he had passed through the third door he found a room where winged disks flew in the blue air. In the centre of the pavement that was sown with stars he found a scarab cut from a single huge emerald. And he raised it. And, behold, alabaster steps led down into the night. He bade his servants light a thousand torches, and, escorted by their thousand flames, he went down into the awakened darkness. And upon the wall the painted forms of men and animals, made living by those flickering fires, seemed to move and run before him, announcing his coming.

At the bottom of these stairs a long gallery stretched, and it was filled with vessels and chariots, with this inscription :

" Haste not. Howsoever slowly thou goest unto the place where thou wouldst go, thou art certain to arrive at length."

Then, porphyry steps led him down into a gallery deeper than the first. And this gallery was filled with jars and vases, with troughs and baskets. And over them was written :

" Take no provisions for thy journey. In that place whither thou goest, thou shalt lack nothing."

And, again, basalt steps led down into a gallery still deeper than the last. And this gallery was filled with weapons and jewels, with thrones and crowns. And over these was written :

" Abandon that which abandoneth thee : quit that which hath quitted thee."

And, at last, the stairs of darkness conducted him to the bottom of darkness. There, below a ceiling of black marble, which was supported by twelve pillars of black marble, twelve sarcophagi stood upright, regarding the silence with eyes that were enamelled upon their golden masks. And upon their pedestals these words were painted :

" Where is the corn that I have eaten ? Where is the wine that I have drunken ? Where are the horses that bore me ? Where are the roofs that sheltered me ? Where are the terrors that I spread abroad ? Where are the loves that I have loved ? Where are the nights that squandered me ? And where the days that I have squandered ? "

And in the middle of the twelve sarcophagi was a colossus in black marble, reclining upon a black marble tomb. And he arose and cried :

" Son of David, King Solomon, I was the King Shedad, son of Ad. I reigned over thousands of provinces, I have ridden horses in their thousands, I have slain thousands of heroes. And I have despoiled kings in their thousands. Now behold ! "

And even as the marble colossus spake, his heels and his toes, his ankles and his knees, his legs and his thighs, slowly, slowly, slowly crumbled and turned into dust. And, like the trunk of a giant oak tree whose branches and whose leafy crest are devoured by an invisible fire, while yet he standeth upright, the belly of the black giant, then his throat, then his arms, his shoulders, and his neck, then his jaws, his nostrils, his eyes, his forehead, then his hair, and at last, his crown, slowly, slowly crumbled and slid down in dust toward the ground.

Then the twelve sarcophagi and the twelve pillars ; then the steps of basalt and porphyry and alabaster ; then the galleries of jewels and thrones, of jars and baskets, of ships and chariots ; then the gold steps and the terraces of gold, and, at last, all the palace of gold, strained and dissolved, and crumbled and sank, until at length it was no more than a handful of dust in all the wide dust of the desert.

Then the demons who hurl spasms and cramps, and boils and cancers, and they that launch wrath and plagues, frenzies and follies, the demons who drop jewels in the eyeballs of the deep, and they that sow salt in the furrows of the sea ; the spirits that light the lightnings on the hearth of the clouds, and they that dash the tempests against the walls of the blue—all these, to escape from the power of Solomon, fled toward mountain and valley, toward wood and plain, toward river and ocean, even to the dark places and to the places of light.

But, raising the four jewels of his ring to the sky, Solomon cried :

" Solomon yet liveth."

And straightway, as though they were bound to the rays of the ring by myriads of impalpable chains, they flocked back again by myriads, running and howling beneath its flames.

But the king looked upon the dust. And he thought :

" Shall not the whole earth become a desert made of the dust of all them who have lived upon it ? Then, death, it is in thee that wisdom inhabits. Then, wisdom, thy abode is with the dust."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

Now, from the time when he visited the Palace of Dust, King Solomon knew sadness.

Each day, in the shadow of the winged vault that the birds of the air arched above his throne, he pondered and meditated. And each day he groaned in his heart :

" Of what use, King of the World, was it to grant me power, since I may only wield the power of a man ? Of what use was it to grant me wisdom, since I may not know the wisdom of God ? "

Now, one evening, a burning ray of light penetrated through two ill-joined wings in the feathery canopy. And it struck the eyes of King Solomon.

" Who hath quitted his post ? " he cried, in his annoyance.

The eagle called one bird after the other, according to their names, until he had numbered all the birds. And it turned out that the hoopoe was absent.

" Go and seek her," ordered the king. " If her excuse avail not, let her be dragged in sand for her punishment, and eaten by vermin."

The eagle sought throughout the spaces of the air, and returned at length with the hoopoe, who trembled for fear in all her feathers.

" Where wert thou ? " demanded the angry king.

" Let my lord the king," answered the hoopoe, " deign to pardon his handmaid. I have sinned but in loving thy glory. For I wished to sing thy glory to all the world. And accordingly I sought a region which had never heard of it. And, behold, after flying for three months with neither food nor drink, I came upon a kingdom which knoweth not thee, King Solomon, and which thou knowest not."

" Have a care," growled the king. " Beware of lies."

" I do not lie, my lord," answered the hoopoe. " I have seen this kingdom among the countries of the East, as plain as I see thee. Sheba is its name, and it hath for capital Chitor. The trees that grow there were planted on the third day in the innocence of the Creation. The streams that water those lawns flow out from Eden. The men who inhabit there know not the point of arrow nor the blade of sword. And Balkis, their queen, who holdeth regiment over them, is the mightiest and the wisest of all mortal beings."

Then Solomon thought :

" If this queen laveth her limbs in the waters of Paradise : if she be nourished by the fruit of trees planted before the Fall, her power is perchance mightier than mine, and wiser than mine her wisdom."

And he had this letter written by his scribes :

" To the Queen Balkis, from Solomon the King. Peace and good health. I am king over all the earth, and all the kings of the earth bow themselves in homage to my power and my wisdom. If thou wilt not come, as they have come, to prostrate thyself before me, and do me homage, I will dispatch mine armies against thee. And in the ranks of these armies

are all the birds of the air, and the beasts of the earth and of the waters, and all the spirits, both they that dwell in the deeps and they that dwell on high."

And he tied the parchment, sealed with his seal, to the wing of the hoopoe, and said to her :

" Carry this letter to Balkis."

And the hoopoe flew, and cried her cry as she went. And all the birds of the air flew after her.

Now, they came unto Chitor in the hour of the morning, when the queen, with arms outstretched toward the light, addressed her prayer unto the sun. As she prayed, suddenly the light thickened, the sun was extinguished, and, from the cloud of wings that darkened the sky, Solomon's letter fell into the breast of Balkis. She took and read it. And she trembled. Then, having assembled her Ministers, she asked their counsel. And they answered :

" We hold as naught King Solomon ; and his kingdom also we hold as naught."

But in her wisdom she did not listen to them. Calling all her shipmen about her, she loaded their vessels with gems and pearls. And she sent into the ships six thousand youths clothed in purple. And all these were born in the same day. And she sent them to Solomon with this letter in answer :

" From the city of Chitor to the land of Israel is a journey of seven years' length. But, since thou desirest to see me, in three years thou shalt have thy will."

Now, along the road which should conduct Queen Balkis to him, Solomon builded two mighty walls.

And they began at the frontier of the land of Israel, and ended at the gate of Jerusalem.

From Thamar to Masada the two walls were of silver From Masada to Enghedi they were of gold. From Enghedi to Hebron, of the pearl ; and from Hebron to Jerusalem they were of diamond. And the same distances of the road he paved with silver, gold, pearls, and diamonds, in like degree.

Then he devised a lake of crystal. And in the middle of this lake a palace of crystal. In the crystal of the lake the whole world was mirrored. And in the crystal of the palace he set his throne. And there he awaited Balkis.

Now, on a day when he was enthroned in his palace of crystal, behold, Balkis appeared. And she was wrapped in purples, and she was crowned with purple also. Behind her purple fans wafted the scent of nard upon the air. And clouds of purple incense went up from her purple-clad escort. And Solomon longed in his heart :

" May she teach me a power greater than my power, and a wisdom mightier than my wisdom ! "

But, when Balkis saw the lake of crystal where the world lay mirrored, her feet trembled. And in order to pass through it she raised her veils of purple even to her knee. Then Solomon thought in his heart :

" For me the world is no more than an image, and, lo ! this queen trembleth at the image of the world."

Now, when Balkis had bowed herself before him, she spoke, saying :

" King Solomon, I brought thee my treasures to

do thee honour. But when I beheld thy walls of silver I threw away my silver basins ; when I beheld thy walls of gold I threw away my golden basins. And I have flung away my crowns of pearl and my crowns of diamond. For I beheld thy pavements of pearl and diamond. For all wealth is poverty beside thy wealth. And all riches are poor beside thy riches."

And he made answer :

" What will it profit a man to be rich in his riches, to be wealthy amid his own wealth, if the day whereon he must leave these things is already appointed ? I have satisfied my mouth and I have filled mine eyes by my labour. And, behold, nothing is left me that I may desire. And I possess nothing that I may keep. For another shall be master in my place, who knoweth how to acquire these things, but without labour : who shall know how to deserve them, yet hath not understanding. Moreover, mine heart abominateth the ill that I have done myself under the sun, that I leave the fruit of my labours to the man who cometh after me. For my toil was vanity and my wealth is vanity."

But Balkis answered :

" The universe lauds the might of thy power, King Solomon. Is it the peer of mine ? In my palace I have a throne adorned with twelve fountains, whence flow rare perfumes. Now, before quitting my palace I hid this throne in a certain room. To reach the room thou must first pass through six other rooms. And I have entrusted the seven keys to the most faithful among my servants. Art thou able, from this distance, to discover the keys, open the rooms, and bring the throne hither, that I may sit upon it before thee ? "

Then Solomon said to Ornias :

" Go thou, and seek me this throne."

" I will bring it thee this evening," replied the demon.

" Shall I still live this evening ? " demanded Solomon.

And the king turned towards Asmodeus, and said :

" Go thou, and seek me this throne."

" In one hour I will bring it thee," replied the Satan.

" Shall I still live in an hour's time ? " demanded Solomon.

And the king turned towards Balkis :

" Look up," he said, " and then look down. And thou shalt see thy throne."

She looked up. And she looked down. And, lo ! the earth opened before her. And the throne with the twelve fountains rose up from the earth.

" And now be seated," Solomon commanded Balkis.

" How shall I be enthroned in the place where thou art enthroned ? " answered the queen. " My power is but weakness beside thy power."

But he groaned aloud, saying :

" What doth it profit a man to be powerful in the midst of his power, if the hour is already appointed when he shall be despoiled ? A live dog availeth more than a dead lion. I gave commandment to the kings of all kingdoms, to all the spirits of the waters, of the earth, and of the sky. But my heart curseth the zeal with which it ran to command them. For all my toil was vanity, and my power also is vanity."

Then Balkis answered :

" Even the angels glorify thy knowledge, King Solomon. Is it the peer of mine ? "

And she opened a casket that contained an emerald, two nosegays, and a cup.

" This emerald," she said, " is pierced twelve times by twelve spiral holes. Canst thou pass thereby a single thread ? "

Solomon took from the mulberry-tree close by a silkworm, and placed it upon the emerald.

And the worm wound his thread twelve times in and out of the twelve spirals, and at length reappeared under the emerald at the end of the thread.

" Of these nosegays," pursued the queen, " one is made of mock flowers and the other of real flowers. Naught distinguisheth one from another to the eye, to the hand, or to the nose. Canst thou distinguish the false flowers from the true ? "

Solomon took a bee from the hive, and set him upon the nosegays. And the bee, scorning the false, plundered the true flowers.

" This cup," the queen said at last, " hath never been filled. Canst thou fill it with water that cometh neither from earth nor from heaven ? "

And Solomon made his liveliest steed gallop twelve times about the plain. And when the animal returned to him, bathed in sweat, he filled the cup from the foam which covered him.

Then Balkis cried aloud :

" It is indeed truth, King Solomon, that which they sing of thy knowledge. I had heard tell of it, but I was not able to believe."

And Solomon sighed :

" Queen Balkis, thou settest me riddles that a horse, a bee, and a worm can decipher—and thou marvellest at my wisdom ! For I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under the sun. And I have gotten more knowledge than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem : this sore travail hath God given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith. For in much wisdom is much grief. And he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow. A man hath done well who addeth deed to deed, but, for all that, to what end doth he tend ? He taketh account only of those things that escape him. All that exists is distant, and very deep. He knoweth not in what way the spirit goeth, nor how it animateth the seed that is in its mother's womb. And he knoweth not how to embrace the work of the six days. Moreover, my soul hateth the question that she hath made of them, and the answers that she hath been given. For all my search was vanity, and all vanity my knowledge."

Now, even as he spoke, a poor widow came before them and implored justice :

" What is thy complaint ? " the king asked her.

" Having compassion because I went hungry," answered the woman, " my lord the king bestowed a sack of flour upon his handmaid yesterday. Now when I opened the sack before the door of my dwelling, behold the wind blew, and carried away my flour."

" Let three sacks be given to her," ordered Solomon.

And the sacks were brought in and given to her. But the widow would by no means depart.

" What claim hast thou still to make ? " asked the king.

" I claim thy justice, King Solomon. The wind robbed me. Let the wind be punished."

" The wind hath not deserved punishment," proclaimed the king.

But Balkis said : " This woman is in the right of it. The wind hath committed theft. Let the wind be punished."

Then Solomon summoned the east wind, and questioned him, saying :

" Wherefore didst thou blow upon the flour that I gave this widow ? "

" I did not so," answered the east wind.

Then he had the west wind and the south wind summoned, and they gave the same answer. And at last he summoned the north wind, and questioned him, saying :

" Wherefore didst thou blow upon the flour that I gave this widow ? "

" I was constrained to do so, in fulfilling my service to the glory of the Most High," answered the wind. " A ship, whereon many of the faithful were passengers, was sailing thither that they might worship the Eternal in his Temple, and it was about to founder upon a rock in the Red Sea To save the ship, I was forced to blow upon it, and in blowing upon it, behold, I blew also upon the flour of thy charity."

" Doth he deserve punishment ? " Solomon asked Balkis.

And the queen cried aloud :

" Happy are thy race, and happy are thy people, who surround thee ceaselessly and who rejoice in thy

word. And praise be to thy God, who hath set thee upon thy throne, who hath set justice upon thy lips and in thy mouth wisdom."

But he sighed :

" What profit hath a just man over the unrighteous ? And how is the wise man exalted above the fool ? Is not the same end reserved for them, doth not the same oblivion devour their names after their death ? What availeth it that a man be chaste or lewd, that he sin or that he sin not, that prudence counsel him or folly lead him, that he walk open-eyed or like a blind man ? All go alike toward darkness where the eye may not see at all. Queen Balkis, Queen Balkis, thou reignest over a country watered by the rivers of Eden, and trees born of the fruit of Paradise lend thee their shade. Behold, I had hoped of thee riches and might, science and wisdom surpassing all that I have. But thou hast given me naught that I do not possess. Thou hast taught me nothing that I did not already know. In every place under the sun, before the face of death, men and beast are equal. Vanity of vanities, all is but vanity."

And the queen answered :

" Wherefore dost thou hold life in hatred because death existeth ? My power is mightier than thine if I esteem it. My wisdom is wiser than thine, if I honour it. There is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to love and a time to hate, a time to curse and a time to bless. There is a time to live, King Solomon, and a time to die."

And, when she had spoken thus, she drew her purples about her, and, beneath her purple crown, Balkis returned and went her way into the land of Sheba.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SHADOWS OF PLEASURE

Now Solomon pondered the lesson of Balkis. And he thought :

" Wherefore have I said in my heart that man is no better than a beast ? The bird is caught in the snare ; the fish is taken in an evil net. But they know not the time when they must die. And, behold, man knoweth it. Before the light of thine eyes is extinguished, it is a pleasant thing to play in the sun. For truly the light is sweet. It is not good to be too wise. Nor it is not wise to be too holy. The better part is to make merry the hours and to chase away the careful days."

But, since he had not the simpleness of heart, nor the innocence of those gardens where Balkis dwelt, he added :

" Refuse thy hand nothing that it may take ; refuse thine eyes nothing that they may desire, refuse thy lips nothing that they may lay hold on. Since there is neither wisdom nor folly, nor debaucheries, nor holiness, under the earth, eat, drink, and be merry. Escape thy nothingness, by the awakening of thy flesh. Multiply thy life, whilst again thou enjoyest thy pleasures."

Then he had builded for himself new dwellings.

And he planted new gardens. But to the end that his joy in them should not grow weary, he destroyed his palaces that he might erect them again, and he took up his gardens that he might lay them out again.

And, since he wished to taste the delights of the whole world, he quarried stones for his palaces from the rocks of all mountains ; in the soil of his gardens he rooted trees from every forest ; and he wove for his raiment, in the fabrics of his mantles, the diverse aspects of every land. For his jewels he distilled metals fallen from the stars. And, in their making, he made use of all the rays of dawn and of sunset, adding their colours to those of the sparkling gems. And their lustre was more various than fine gold.

Since his horses no longer sufficed him, he increased their number tenfold. And as his tables no longer satisfied him, he enlarged their size and refined their delicacy an hundredfold. And the flesh of every kind of beast was dressed and served to him there, according to the tastes of all nations. And rivers of wine were poured out there, flowing from all the vines of the earth.

But, above all, it was in women that he sought to renew his pleasures. The seventy daughters of the kings, whom he had wedded to bring about the peace of the world, had held in their arms nothing but a soul distracted with thought. Therefore he took three hundred concubines wise in the caresses of the north and of the south, of the west, and of the east. And every night he took to wife a virgin princess. And he instructed her in the embraces of the courtesans.

Often he made festival for himself, and his wives were indistinguishable, for their number and their

nakedness. And, full of meat and drunken with wine, amid the cry of every music known that might minister to the passions, he sank himself deeper and deeper into his lusts.

And in these days, at the foot of his empty throne, crowds were wont to await his justice. And his mother, Bathsheba, rousing herself at noon from her slumber, went in to him, and looking down upon his couch, she cried aloud :

" Solomon, Solomon, what doest thou with thy wisdom ? "

Among all his women, however, now one and now another, by her skill in the pleasures which his flesh demanded, enchained him for a while to serve her whims. From the master that he had been, he found himself becoming a slave. And he felt his will, like his wisdom, to be weakening within him.

On a day, Reblah, the daughter of the King of Gomer, being at this time the favourite of his senses, spoke unto Solomon, saying :

" Wilt thou show me thy love ? Then build me a palace which shall be builded wholly of the bones of the birds of the air."

The king agreed to this. And he ordered his archers to slay birds to the right number. From the earth the arrows sped up toward the winged vault that sheltered his throne. And nightingale and raven, eagle and swallow, reed-warbler and vulture fell alike, clean out of the blue. And their cries, as they fell, made a rain of agony. And the earth was littered with feathers and small dying bodies. And thousands of hands tore their bones from their despoiled flesh. And other birds

flocked in their thousands and hovered above the throne to fall in their turn into the destroying hands.

Already the sky grew empty of song and of colour. Nevertheless, the little bones heaped up for the foundations of the promised palace scarcely raised a wall the height of a brick. And it was more fragile than dust. Only the sparrows, who, of all birds are the most astute, had escaped the general slaughter of their kind.

Now the king of the sparrows came and perched upon the branch of a tree that shaded Solomon's window. And he cried :

" King Solomon, come to thy lattice and answer me." And, when Solomon was come thither :

" Which are the more numerous, men or women ? " asked the bird.

" Men, without any doubt at all," answered Solomon.

" Thou art wrong," replied the king of the sparrows. " For among the women we must include men with brains like women. And thou art numbered among them, King Solomon. Otherwise thou wouldest not destroy innocent creatures to please the idle brain of a woman."

At these words, Solomon scratched his beard. Then he gave orders to stop the massacre. In vain Reblah importuned him every day. In vain she daily became more incensed. It was of her that he wrote later in his *Proverbs* :

> It is better to dwell in the corner of a house-top
> than with a brawling woman in a wide house.

And he abandoned her to her anger and the palace of bird-bones was never built.

Another time, Glimith, daughter of the King of Tubal, was, for the time, Solomon's favourite. One night, as they lay in each other's arms, he swore to teach her to understand the language of animals. Now he knew, through a warning from God, that should he ever let this secret escape him, he should die on the instant.

On the morrow she demanded that he fulfil his promise.

" Wait but a week," he answered.

At the end of a week she again recalled his oath.

" Wait but until I finish my prayers," And when the prayer was finished he called all the people of the palace together. And he said to them :

" I sware an oath to my wife, Glimith. If I hold to it I shall die on the instant. Reason with her that I may be freed from it."

They interceded with Glimith, but she answered :

" Solomon hath sworn. Let him keep his oath."

Then he called together all the inhabitants of the city. And they, in their turn, made supplication to the queen. But no one could bend her obstinacy. At last he summoned all the inhabitants of his kingdoms. And they cried out and appealed to Glimith :

" Is it the queen's will," they said, " that the king perish, putting his people and the whole world into mourning ? "

But the wilful queen only repeated :

" Solomon hath sworn. Let him keep his oath."

Then the king resigned himself, saying :

" To-morrow, before dawn, I shall fulfil my promise, and the sun shall never again look upon me alive."

The night long, all they of the palace, all they of the city, and all they of the land, made lamentation, and threw ashes upon their heads. And all the kings of the world with their peoples groaned for sorrow of this thing. And while the sound of weeping went up from winds and mountains, from seas and meadows, and while the sky, rending his cloudy mantle with the blade of the lightning, shed tears also, all the beasts that dwell upon earth and in the waters, and all the birds of the air sighed and sobbed in their distress :

" The Sage dieth, the Sage dieth."

But before dawn, amid the general grief of the universe, behold the cock began to crow. The dog straightway leapt at his throat.

" What art thou doing ? " Solomon asked the dog.

" I wish to punish this impudent fellow who sings when all the world weeps for thee."

" I sing," answered the cock, " because I feel myself wiser than the Sage whom the whole world weeps. Solomon is about to die for the sake of pleasing a wilful woman. But, when any of my wives try to have their way with me, I prove to them with strokes of my beak that I am still alive."

" This bird is not wrong," observed Solomon. " The lash for the horse, the halter for the ass, and for the shoulders of the fool the whip."

And he thrashed Queen Glimith with all his might, crying out to her :

" Dost thou still desire that I keep my oath ? " And the queen answered :

" May it please my lord to beat his handmaid. He hath sworn nothing."

But as he went from woman to woman, from debauch to debauch, Solomon thought he heard sometimes, among the shrill voices of his pleasure, a gentler voice that sang out of the depths of the years :

" Where art thou, my beloved,
Whither art thou gone ?
Wilt thou go up into thy garden,
To the beds of anemones,
To feed thy flock in the gardens,
And to gather lilies.
Or wilt thou go down into the garden of nuts,
To see the young shoots of the valley ?

And the voice sang again :

" Many waters cannot quench love,
Neither can the floods drown it.
If a king give all the substance of his royalty to buy love,
He loseth his royalty, but he gaineth not love."

Then, in his longing for her whom, in his youth, he had not known how to make his own, and keep, he sought among his wives for another Shulamite.

One day, he thought he had found her. It was Dibonah, daughter of the King of Moab. Her forehead was as pure as the forehead of Ruth. Her form had the grace of Naomi's form. And all her gestures were an echo of Abishag.

Now Solomon, thinking in her at last to catch hold on the chastity of his first love, murmured to her :

" Behold, thou art fair, O my love ; behold thou art fair.
Thy hair is as a flock of goats
That go down from Mount Gilead,
Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep,
Which come up from the washing
In two peerless rows.
Thy stature is like unto a palm tree ;
Thy two breasts are two grapes. . . . "

But, in the extremity of his passion, he defiled the pure memory of the shepherdess. And Dibonah loved him no longer.

Sometimes she glided from his couch, where he lay drugged in the slumbers of wine. And she betook herself for refuge to the bed of a certain prince of Moab, whom she had disguised among her servants.

Now, one night, Solomon saw that he was alone. And he sought for his love, and discovered at length where she lay. Then he cried out :

" I have found that which is more bitter than death. It is woman, whose arms are bands and whose heart is snares and nets."

And, in the rage of his betrayed passion, he quartered the unfaithful woman, tying her naked to the knotted tails of four horses. And he tore the dead image of his last innocence into red fragments upon the plain.

Now, while he thus descended from drunkenness to drunkenness, and from lust to lust, Solomon might have seen, going up in the distance, on the falling pathway of his life, madness and cruelty, the red and murderous shadows of his pleasures.

CHAPTER XX

THE TWILIGHT OF THE SAGE

In the Porch of Gold, before the empty throne, beasts and men waited together for the justice of the king.

At the hour of noon, his mother Bathsheba tore him from the slumbers of wine. Yawning, he arrived. And, reeling, he mounted upon his throne. A murmur arose in the crowd.

" Wherefore do ye murmur ? " cried a voice. " Because the king loveth his wine ? Is he not right ? The fear of water is the beginning of wisdom."

" Who hath spoken ? " demanded Solomon.

" One of thy peers, King Solomon," answered the voice. " I am the king of fools, and I reign throughout the earth."

" What is thy name ? "

" Markou."

" Thou pleasest me, Markou. Come and seat thyself at the foot of my throne."

And when Markou was seated :

" Which shall I judge first ? " said Solomon to him. " Men or beasts ? "

" Beasts," answered Markou. " They are more akin to kings than men are."

Then the ant stepped forward and spoke, saying :

" The elephant trampleth my sisters under his

feet by millions. Chastise his cruelty, King Solomon, or we perish utterly."

"Of what moment is it," answered Solomon, between two yawns, "whether there are ants or whether there are none?"

The ant fell back in silence and the cow came forward and spoke:

"I am old," she said, "and I have borne into the world more than thirty calves. One after the other the master whom I serve hath devoured them. And, although my flesh is unclean, and, according to the Law, forbidden to his mouth, behold, he would devour me in my turn."

"Why dost thou come to me?" answered Solomon between two hiccups. "Wert thou not born for the slaughter-house?"

The cow fell back, lowing; and the dromedary advanced. But Solomon cried with the voice of slumber:

"Enough of animals! Men now. With whom shall we begin?"

"With the richest," said Markou, "for he is the least guilty."

The richest man present therefore advanced.

"How much bringest thou?" Solomon asked him.

"Ten thousand shekels."

"Hand them over to my treasurer, and tell me thine affair."

But the richest man had scarcely begun to tell his tale when his voice could no longer be heard. For Solomon, with mighty growlings, snored upon his

throne. A murmur ran through the waiting beasts and men.

" Never complain when justice sleeps," said Markou to them. And he dismisssed the court.

Then, curled up at the feet of the king, he slept also. And the double sound of their snoring filled the Golden Porch.

Now, when evening came, being awakened by sickness, Solomon awoke Markou also, and asked him :

" Of what thinkest thou, king of fools ? "

And he made answer :

" I was asking myself whether the king of Sages, who can read the riddles of the wise men, could read also the riddles of fools."

" Try me," replied the king.

" Which is the master," continued Markou, " who best maketh himself obeyed ? "

" God," said Solomon.

" Dost thou obey His Torah ? "

" The king, then," pursued Solomon.

" Art thou not obedient to thy sickness ? "

" What then ? I do not understand."

" Invite me to supper and I will explain to thee."

Now, the king had a cat. And he had taught her to hold between her forepaws a candle which burned like a sun. And, during the time when he ate, the candle with its sun, held by the two paws of the cat, gave him light.

And first they served a pike as large as a shark. Markou took from his pocket a live mouse, which he had hidden there, and threw it under the table. But

the cat did not move. Next they served a kid, larger than a hundred beeves. Markou, by stealth, threw a second mouse under the table. But the cat did not move. Next they brought in, with a thousand hazel hen, a gold basin wider than a lake, which they filled with spices and with syrup of hydromel. Markou this time openly threw a third mouse under the table. Then the cat let fall her sun into the sauce, leapt from the table, but came back again immediately, bearing the mouse between her two paws in place of the candle.

Solomon burst out laughing. And Markou said to him :

" Behold the master who best maketh himself to be obeyed, King Solomon. It is the instinct to injure. It laugheth at discipline. It hath neither law nor faith. And it leadeth beasts and men as easily as it leadeth kings."

" Thy folly is worth more than my wisdom," concluded Solomon. And he invited Markou to come and live in his palace.

Now the Queen Bathsheba, despairing of her son's way of life, swore never to look upon him more. And she withdrew herself into her own dwelling, to die.

The sinner king continued to carouse at the lips of wine, and in the arms of women. But, as he said in *Proverbs* :

> Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful ;
> And the end of that mirth is heaviness.

And he waited in a fear that troubled his hope of deliverance for the death of her who had once wished to make him the Messiah.

Every evening he sent a new messenger to spend the night in the palace of Bathsheba. And every morning, before the rising of the sun, the messenger came again to tell him that she yet lived. But he had made proclamation :

" He who announceth to me the death of my mother, his head shall be struck off and impaled upon a pike on the battlement."

" He will keep his head, or thou wilt lose thine," Markou had answered.

" As I live, he shall die," the king had replied.

Every evening he saw the messenger go forth. And he was both hopeful and afraid. And every morning he saw him return again. And again he was both fearful and full of hope.

One morning he learned that Bathsheba lay in agony. Now, the messenger whom he sent on the evening of this day was the son of a widow. And he departed weeping.

" Wherefore weepest thou ? " asked Markou, meeting him by the way.

" My hours are numbered," answered the other. " For to-morrow I must tell the king of the death of his mother."

" Give me ten pieces of gold," replied Markou. " I will go in thy place."

Happy at this bargain, the man gave him the ten pieces, and Markou went off whistling to the palace where the queen lay in agony.

He kept watch until midnight. Then, hearing the sound of footsteps, he perceived, outside, a shadow that spied in at the lattice of the window. It was the servant of Solomon, whom the king sent every night,

to make certain that the other messenger had not been unfaithful to his duty.

Markou caught sight of a blade suspended on the wall. He opened the door. And as the servitor entered he brandished the sword and severed his head. The moment after, Bathsheba gave up the ghost.

In the morning, Solomon waited between fear and hope for the return of the son of the widow. And, behold, Markou appeared in his place.

" King Solomon," he cried, with imploring voice, " grant me thy pardon. I have severed the hair of thy servant."

" I pardon thee," said Solomon.

" But I must confess to thee," added Markou, " that, when his hair fell, his head fell also."

" Thou shalt die," cried Solomon.

" A king does not take back his pardons," answered Markou confidently.

" So be it. What other news hast thou brought me ? "

" The glory of God shineth upon the world."

" I understand thee not. What is it thou wouldst say ? "

" I would say that the sun is risen."

" What then ? "

" The earth below hath gone up to the earth above."

" I understand thee not. Yet again, what is it thou wouldst say ? "

" I would say that the ploughman is at his plough."

" And what then ? " insisted Solomon.

" Night hath thrown down the first house where thou didst inhabit."

" I understand thee not. What art thou saying? That my mother is dead? "

" It is thou who hast announced it to me, King Solomon. Let thy head, at the end of a pike, be set up on thine own roof."

Thus the fool escaped death and had the better of the wise man. As he had foretold.

Over and above his three hundred concubines, Solomon now had five hundred wives.

Now, while she yet lived, the Queen Bathsheba sighed daily, and said :

" Since my son sins with so many women, at least let him have a son from each, who may recount the glory that was his, in the days that come after."

But Bathsheba died. And, of all his women, Solomon had had but one son. Now this son was born with one foot, one hand, one ear, and one eye only.

Solomon, who formerly had cured all ills and given back to old men of a hundred winters the power to beget children, wished to give back to the new-born child the foot, the hand, the ear, and the eye that the Creator had refused him.

But in vain he rubbed him with unguents and bathed him in lotions. In vain he murmured incantations for the absent limbs. The foot would not grow, nor the hand, nor the ear, nor the eye.

" Of what moment is it," Markou asked him, " whether thy son count in even numbers or in odd? "

" In memory of my mother," answered the king, " I would that the child might be whole and complete. That he may recount my glory, when I am here no longer."

"To-night," replied Markou, "I desire to send thee upon a walk. Wilt thou swear to go, even to the very end, without saying a word to thy companions?"

And Solomon, puzzled, sware as Markou desired.

Then Markou gave orders to a servant to go before the king and conduct him into the darkness. And he gave orders to forty others to follow them with forty torches, but at such a distance that they could hear nothing if the king cried out to them, and at a distance such that he could see nothing of their forty lights.

The way was long, and in the murky hours it led Solomon through mud and swamp. In spite of his oath he called his escort an hundred times, bidding them draw near to him with their forty torches. But they heard not a word of his fury. And when, on the morrow, he appeared before Markou, with his mantle torn and dirty, the fool feigned surprise, and asked him:

"How comes it that my lord the king hath changed his royal mantle for rags? Did not his servant give him forty torches to light his way?"

"They walked behind me. And I saw them not."

"If thou desirest glory to follow thee, King Solomon, five hundred sons, after thy life, be they more brilliant than the stars, will but leave thy name in shadow. Procure, rather, one or two virtues before thy death. For these shall light thee lights about thy name."

The king, enraged, called his headsman, and commanded him to hang Markou on the spot.

"Grant me one favour, King Solomon," cried

Markou. " Let me at least choose the place of my death."

" So be it," responded Solomon. " But make haste."

In the garden the executioner would have hanged him.

" This place is not pleasing to me," said Markou.

In the mountain the executioner would have hanged him.

" This place is not pleasing to me," said Markou.

And, followed by executioner and king, he walked throughout the length and breadth of the land of Israel. And always he was near to death, and far from dying.

At last, overcome by laughter, the king dismissed him. But, in departing, Markou spoke to him and said :

" Is it Markou who is changed ? Or is Solomon no longer Solomon ? How will they weep for the king of fools, if he teacheth wisdom to the king of the sages."

CHAPTER XXI

THE SUPPLICATION OF ADAM

Over and above his three hundred concubines, King Solomon now possessed six hundred and ninety-nine wives. For each one he had builded a palace, and in an inner room of the palace of each was an idol that she secretly worshipped.

Now, one day, Asmodeus said to the King :

"If thou art a great king, Solomon, thou wilt choose for thy seven hundredth wife Iamith, the daughter of Maïmel, King of the Ocean, who reigns in the Distant Isle. For her body has the changing colours of the waves. And alone it is more various and delightful than all the bodies of thy other wives together."

Solomon, therefore, sent Benaiah his servant upon the back of an eagle to Maïmel, King of the Ocean. And he carried this message :

" Let thy daughter Iamith become my wife."

But Maïmel had an idol made of loadstone, and he would determine nothing unless he had first consulted with this idol.

Now Solomon, given over to debauches and carousals, was less vigilant than formerly over his demons. And Asmodeus had therefore sent the demon Ornias into the Distant Isle, if haply he might hide within the loadstone idol.

And when Maïmel consulted it, behold, the idol answered with the voice of Ornias :

" Refuse thy daughter."

Now, Benaiah reported this answer to Solomon. And when Solomon heard it, rage inflated his nostrils. And he sent a second message to the King of the Ocean, saying :

" I am king over all the earth. And all the kings of the earth do homage to my power. If thou refusest Iamith to my couch, behold, I will send against thee all my armies, even the armies of all the warriors in all my kingdoms, with the armies of the birds of the air, of all the beasts that are on the earth, and in the waters, and with the armies of all the spirits from below the earth and above it."

But the idol answered again with the voice of Ornias :

" What fearest thou from Solomon, King Maïmel, in thy Distant Isle ? "

And Maïmel sent a second refusal to the second demand. And Solomon made ready for war.

For his soldiery, he tore all the men who were able and strong in body from their labours. All those that were between the ages of eighteen and forty he took from among the men of Israel and from those of the nations. And in order to make swords and spears, he tore from the plough its ploughshare. And since this iron was not enough, he emptied of iron ore all the veins of the earth. He took wood from all his trees to make bows, and hemp from all the fields for their strings. He rolled into balls rocks from every mountain, and with the wood from tree-trunks he fashioned

mighty engines to propel them. He unfurled for his standards the thread of every stuff; rounded into trumpets copper from all his mines. And, changing into malevolence, all his knowledge and all his power, to the end that his murderous vats might be filled with death, he fetched pestilence from the fevers of the marshes, poisons from the venoms of the hemlock, and all their fires from the lava of the volcanoes.

Then he commanded his Satans to weave him a carpet of bronze interwoven with steel. And it was to be one hundred thousand times longer than the first carpet, and one hundred thousand times broader. And, when they had extended this carpet upon the plain, he mounted upon it his warriors, his chariots, his horses, his swords and his spears, his bows and his arrows, his engines and his bullets, his clarions, his pennons, and his vats filled with poison and plague and fire. And beneath a pavilion of purple, more sweet with incense than the Holy of Holies, his three hundred concubines with his six hundred and ninety and nine wives thronged for his pleasure.

But on the last night before his departure to war, as he slumbered among them, behold, in the Valley of Joshaphat a tomb opened. And from this tomb a winding-sheet arose. And skeleton feet came out from beneath the shroud. And skeleton hands came forth from it. And a skull rose out of the shroud that went up from the tomb. And it had neither eyes, nor hair, nor any skin.

Then the feet of the shroud glided among the warriors and their arms, among the poisons and the flames. Then the hands of the shroud felt, in the purple

shadows, the flesh of one body after another. And at last the head leaned over the face of Solomon. And the mouth spoke unto him, although it had no lips.

But as he spake, behold, the lips of his mouth reddened. A beard grew upon his blanched cheeks, from his forehead waved tresses of hair. And the empty sockets were filled with eyes. And his voice said :

" King Solomon, dost thou not recognise me ? I am Nathan, the prophet who anointed thy forehead with the anointing of peace, King of Peace ! Is it not enough that thou hast defiled with lust the body that God made for thee, into which He thought to breathe the spirit of His Messiah ? Is it not enough that thou hast vomited thy justice and thy wisdom as thou vomitest thy wine ? Wilt thou destroy the Temple in destroying peace ? In destroying peace, wilt thou also destroy the world ? Hold back, hold back, King Solomon. Render his flames again to the volcano, to the plough his iron, and return man to the harvest. Or else, hunted by the Lord from all thy royalties, thou shalt wander upon the face of the earth, like an exiled people."

But Solomon hearkened not. For his body slept. And within his body his soul slept also. And when at dawn the winding-sheet went down again into its tomb, the armed carpet rose up into the air.

Just as he had done formerly, Solomon passed over the seven regions of the earth in his flight. Then, leaving behind him the darkness of Eretz, he hovered over the shades that float above the ocean. And, when he had flown thirty nights without days, behold, he

saw from the height of his carpet, hanging afar off, a new day. But this day was not clear and brilliant like a day of the sky ; it was blue-green and dim like a day of water. The air, heavier than its wont, rolled there in waves of colour, streaking space with its floating rays, where yellow became blue, or red green, where brown, orange, and violet merged and shifted ceaselessly to make the ebb and flow of shining tides.

And, above the carpet, the assembled birds closed in again to form their winged vault. And, below, the monsters of the deep assembled their tails armed with spurs, their backs cuirassed in scales, and their jaws bristling with stings. And they followed, like a furrow ploughed by his shadow upon the waters.

And now, behold, the Isle appeared in its immensity. And it was planted with corn of opal and with lawns of emerald. And its forests were coral, and its mountains mother-of-pearl. And little by little, as he descended slowly upon the carpet, Solomon made out cities of amethyst and towers of crystal, and the antiphonal voices of folk at prayer. And they sang canticles sweeter by far than the song the shells sing.

Then the willow-warbler mounted upon the column of dawn, and sang :

" Peace be to the world."

And next the turtle-dove mounted upon the column of noon, and sang :

" Peace be to the world."

And last the eagle rose up on the column of evening, and sang :

" Peace be to the world."

But Solomon hearkened not, for he no longer understood the language of birds.

And first the engines launched their bullets, and they fell upon the Isle like a rain of rocks. Then the archers let fly their arrows, and these, steeped in poison, fell upon the Isle like a rain of adders. Then the vats poured forth the fires of the volcanoes. And, behold, opal corn, coralline forests, cities of amethyst, and towers of crystal were changed into ashes. Then the vats poured forth again miasmas from the swamps. And all who survived fell on sleep, and vultures swooped down and pecked out their eyes. And serpents glided down and strangled their throats. And tigers leapt down and tore them limb from limb. And at last the Satans came down and dismembered their souls.

Iamith alone was left alive, reclining her luxurious body with its changing hues along her sheltered and unharmed couch. And Solomon descended. And among the corpses he made her his wife beneath the colours of the sky.

Then, as he carried his new treasure off to the heights, all the monsters of the deep came to mine the foundations of the island with the spurs of their tails, and, seizing the mother-of-pearl cliffs in their jaws bristling with stings, they went down again with their booty into the liquid dark.

Now when the king returned, as he was flying through space, he feared lest the people of the seventy kingdoms, thinking him vanished for ever, should have rebelled. And, in order to recall his power to

them, through terror, ten times upon his carpet he made the tour of the seven regions of earth, and from the heights of the air he hurled rocks and arrows and poison and flames.

Then the voice of Adam mounted into space. And it cried aloud, saying :

" I suffer, I suffer. King Solomon, King Solomon, it is my flesh that thine arrows pierce. It is upon my bones that thy rocks fall. It is my blood that burneth in thy flames. And my heart, alas, my heart ceaseth to beat, for thy poisons have changed it into death."

But Solomon hearkened not. For he no longer understood the language of man.

CHAPTER XXII

THE REVENGE OF THE DEMON

Upon Mount Moriah the Temple still stood upright, and still within its walls heaven was one with earth. In the huge courtyard the smoke of the altar went upwards, even to the Most High. And it was like a giant cypress-tree. And in the Sanctuary, as though it had been heavenly blood, the vine from the golden grapes flowed down towards Adam. And in the depths of the Holy of Holies, below the outstretched wings of the two Cherubim, the two tables of the Covenant were united within the Ark.

Now, even in his carousals, Solomon kept some dim memory of God. But for days and for months, and at length for years, each one of his favourites, in order better to enslave her husband, had sought to enslave him to the idol whom she worshipped.

Seïra the Edomite, upon the counsel of Asmodeus, had used trickery. At the entry of the hidden room, where she was wont to prostrate herself in secret, at the feet of her god, he had had a certain door arranged by his demons. And this door, instead of shutting from left to right, closed from top to bottom. One day, Seïra, followed by Solomon, who had no notion whither she conducted him, penetrated before him into the

room. And in order that he should prostrate himself, even against his will, she would have made the door fall down upon his shoulders.

But the king, bethinking himself of the trap, would by no means go in. And he shut his wife with her idol into the room.

Later, Sonmanites the Jebusite, upon the counsel of Asmodeus, used affectation and coaxing.

" What would it cost thee, my little Solomon," she said to him, " to sacrifice a little grasshopper to my little god ? Thine own God is so far away that He will see nothing. And, besides, He only eats beef."

Solomon was amused, and one morning he agreed. And to please the Jebusite he sacrificed, laughingly, every day a grasshopper to her god. But when he grew tired of these affectations he left the idol to his wife, and his wife to the grasshoppers.

Now Iamith, daughter of the King of the Ocean, upon the counsel of Asmodeus, made use at the same time of his desires and her own tears. Refusing to her husband the changing joys of her body, she sighed :

" How may I caress and embrace thee, King Solomon ? Thou hast thrown my mother-of-pearl island to the sharks for food. And my father thou hast thrown as food to death."

These tears but increased his passion, and he answered :

" In place of thy island I will give thee the earth, and in place of thy father, I will give thee the world."

But she only sobbed, and with the voice of the tides she said again :

" Since thou canst render unto me neither my island nor my father, render me my god, King Solomon. And thou shalt enjoy my embraces."

Then he commanded Asmodeus to cut an idol out of a mighty loadstone. And the idol's hair was a foam of loadstone, her thighs were carved in waves of loadstone, and her knees were reefs of loadstone. And an impalpable wind went out from the idol, and, returning back again to her, by some invincible attraction, it drew offerings and worshippers thither to her feet.

" Behold thy god," said Solomon to Iamith.

" She may not be worshipped in secret," she sighed ; " build her a temple."

And when the demons had built it :

" Serve my god," she sighed again, " and I will serve thee."

And, before the eyes of all, he went in to the temple, bearing offerings of silver and gold. But, from the moment when he entered, the offerings, drawn out of his hands, flew towards the idol. And Solomon himself, drawn along with them, before the eyes of all his people, was thrown at the feet of loadstone, and he kissed them.

Then, upon the altar before the sanctuary of the Eternal, the smoke which went up like a cypress, even to the Most High, of a sudden ceased to go up. And it spread out, even to the four horizons, and hung there, the motionless foliage of a mighty cloud. And it divided heaven from earth.

Now, when the concubines and the other wives saw the temple that had been raised to Iamith's idol, they

conspired together that they should all refuse themselves to the king until such time as they had temples, each one for her idol.

And, behold, in all the public places of the marble city, in the depths of the valleys which girdled their walls and on the tops of the mountains that girdled the valleys, from Hebron to the plain of Mamre, in all the sacred places sanctified by the Patriarchs, from Gibeon to Shiloh, in all the places that the Ark in its wanderings had blessed, from the sources of rivers to the shores of the sea, from the deserts of Judah to the plains of Sharon ; upon Mount Olivet and upon Carmel and upon Ebal, upon Hermon, upon Tabor and upon Gerizim, upon all the high places of all the tribes throughout the land of Israel ;—the hands of the Satans, instructed by Solomon, planted groves, altars, and stone pillars, alleys of shapeless blocks, and alleys of the Sphynx cut from porphyry, wooden cabins, and cabins of dried mud, or of plaited leaves, pylons, porches, colonnades, and towers with seven terraces painted in seven diverse colours.

And in each of these new temples its idol was installed. And, prostituting his soul to each of these gods as he prostituted his body to each of his women, Solomon worshipped them, turn by turn.

He sought the future in the entrails of hogs, in the flight of sparrowhawks, and in the murmur of oak-trees. He summoned the dead with the sounding of trumpets, and he routed their ghosts by beating upon stretched skins. He sent kisses to the stars. He poured out perfumes upon the roof for the sake of the moon, he made the sun to drink oil, he nourished the earth with viands and the sea with jewels.

He offered, as offerings, hair, nails, spittle, dung, the feet of lizards, and the heads of toads. And he piped, that he might charm serpents.

He clothed himself in feathers, and in scales, in pelts and in manes, in order to become shark or vulture, jackal or leopard. He inebriated himself with the fumes of hemlock, so that he might whirl about and shriek in the visions of delirium, to fall down again at length, babbling in the spasms of death.

Not content with sacrificing slaughtered beasts, he sent them alive into furnaces. Then, haunted by the hope of human victims, he drowned, in ponds, images of maidens adorned in veils of blue and red, and in the furnaces he burned statues of youths whose hearts he ate in honour of strange gods. And soon he took to opening wounds in the bellies of men and in the throats of women.

And, for his libations of blood, he traced with a knife upon his own skin the picture of his orgies. And he cut into his own flesh.

Then the divine blood that flowed from the grapes in the Sanctuary ceased to flow. And, in the holy stone that was the foundation of the Temple, the heart of Adam ceased to beat.

But it was not enough for this sinner to be alone in his idolatry. He willed that all Israel should have share in his sin. Upon the mountain before Jerusalem, the priests of Ashur embraced with their naked bodies the daughters of Sion. And in the hollow of the Vale of Hinnom, fathers and mothers brought their firstborn to the iron Moloch, and rolled them into his flaming jaws.

Then a voice, the daughter of the sky, cried aloud :

"Repent thee, Solomon, repent thee. Thou hast but one day more and then penitence may not avail."

But Solomon hearkened not. For he no longer understood the language of God.

Now, upon that night, from the cabins of wood, from the huts of dried mud and of leaves, from pylon, porch, and colonnade, and from the towers of seven terraces painted each a different colour, shadows went forth. And they left Hebron and Mamre and all the places sanctified by the Patriarchs. And they left Gideon and Shiloh and all the places that the Ark in its wanderings had made sacred. And they left the sources of the rivers and the shores of the seas, the deserts of Judah and the plains of Sharon. And Carmel they left, and Hermon and Ebal and Tabor and Gerizim, and all the high places of all the tribes throughout the land of Israel. And the shadows were Sobkû the Crocodile and Apôpi the Viper, Sibû, Khnûmû, Ra, and Phtah, Hâthor with the head of a cow, and Thot with the head of an ibis, Apis and Isis, Mnevis and Nephthys, Shamgar and the twelve sons of Bel with bodies of the tiger. Nergal and Nebo necked like bulls, Ninib and Marduk with their long wings, Shamash and Sin, Chemosh and Dagon, Baal-Zephron, Baal-Hazor and. Baal-Peor, the idols of Assyria. And those of Babel went forth, those of Gaza and those of Damascus, those of Tyre and of Sidon, even all the gods of the oak-tree and the cypress-tree, of basalt and of porphyry, of copper and of silver went up in tumult to the slopes of Mount Moriah. And the huge court of the Sanctuary they filled with snout and beak and nostril, with feathers and fangs, and claws

and hooves, with eyeballs, with mewing and chirping and yelping and croaking, with howling and bellowing. And they heaped their dung into the bronze bath, and they covered the sapphire pavement with their dances. And, leaping upon the altar of sacrifice and the altar of perfumes and upon the tables of gold and the candlestick of gold, they rushed shouting into the inmost depths of the Holy of Holies.

Then the two golden Cherubim who watched over the Ark in the sacred shadows slowly began to move, and, ascending the night sky with their wings unfolded, they bore the Torah even to the Throne of God.

And the Torah groaned before the Eternal :

" Wilt thou much longer suffer me to be defiled, King of the World, seeing I am Thy companion through all eternity ? Solomon, whom Thou wouldst have made Thy Messiah, hath heaped up horses and chariots, riches and delights. And at the feet of the gods of the dust he hath broken all Thy Commandments, and he hath changed into sin all Thy blessings with which Thou blessed him aforetime. Wilt Thou still wait, Lord, to pronounce his punishment ? "

And God answered :

" I gave him wisdom and power. He hath rejected wisdom. Let him be deprived of power."

At the hour of noon, Asmodeus, who was still in chains, said to Solomon :

" Give me thy ring."

Now, so foolish and so stupid had the Master of Wisdom become in his debaucheries and his idolatries that he took from his finger the ring with the four

jewels, and the name of the Eternal, and set it in the hand of the demon.

Then Asmodeus suddenly towered up until he was as tall as the skies. And, breaking his chains, he hurled the ring into the whirlpool of the waters. And he took King Solomon and tossed him into the gulfs of the air.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BEGGAR IN EXILE

Asmodeus, having taken the semblance of the king, his crown, his sceptre, and his royal mantle, seated himself upon the throne of Israel, in the Porch of the Pillars of Gold. And no man in Israel knew that the son of David had disappeared.

But Solomon, hurled by the demon through space, was fallen sleeping in a wilderness of rocks. And, when he awoke, behold, he had neither crown nor sceptre nor royal mantle. The sun burned his naked head, his bare feet were bleeding. In his hand he held a maple staff, and a ragged garment clung to his skin. For a long while he looked about him, seeking his feasts, his women, and his idols, and at last he muttered :

" I desired to know joy. And joy also is but vanity."

And he went his way, leaning upon his staff.

Now, until evening he journeyed, without finding herbs or grass for his food. But, when he lay down in the darkness, with the pangs of hunger in his stomach, he dared not sleep. Lest Asmodeus return, his ring upon his hand ; lest he launch against him the hosts of Satans ! Solomon saw their shapes come forth from the gloom, those shapes wherein all hues were mingled ; asses' ears upon manes of lions, elephants' trunks under the wings of bats, vultures' claws in the scales of fish,

feet bristling with teeth and arms bristling with heads ; white eyes in blue faces above green bellies, red eyes in yellow faces above black bellies. All were there. And, robbed of his powers, the king who had commanded the spirits of the waters, of the earth, and of the sky, heard their frightful jaws crunching in the silence.

After three days without food and three nights without sleep, he came to the edge of a river, which flowed both broad and deep. And alongside the river ran a road leading to the ramparts of a town. Seeing a crust of bread among the dirt by the way, although it was as dry as a stone, he bent down to pick it up. But, as he steeped it in the water to soften it a little, the hand of the wave snatched it from his hand.

Then he went into the town and begged from door to door, lamenting :

" I am King Solomon. I reigned over Israel."

But all said :

" Who is this madman who pretendeth to be the king, when the king is upon his throne ? "

And they shut their doors in his face, without putting anything into his outstretched hand.

He went along the streets, and, begging alms of the passers-by, he lamented :

" I am King Solomon. I reigned over Israel."

But all made answer :

" If thou art the king, give us of thy gold." And children followed him, whistling and throwing stones, laughing and calling after him :

" King Solomon, where are thy wives ? Where are thy wives, King Solomon ? "

At first he was angry with those who jeered at him.

And he returned stone for stone, and insult for insult. Then he said to himself :

" Of what use is it to reprove the mocker ? That is more foolish than his mockery."

So extreme was his misery, that the beggars themselves hunted him out from among them, with blows and curses :

" If thou art king," they shouted, " get thee gone. Beg no longer, but remount thy throne. Thou hast stolen our charity, which belongeth alone to us."

Then he thought :

" Have I lost my name in losing my wealth ? Have I lost my soul in losing my wisdom ? Was I ever in truth King Solomon ? "

And, fumbling in a memory, darkened by hunger, he sought his past in the dreams of the night. And at length, overcome by doubt, he concluded :

" What matters it whether I was indeed King Solomon or no ? I never was he, since I am he no longer."

And henceforth he begged without naming his name.

One day, when he was holding out his wooden almsbowl at the entry of the city, an old man, who was going out by the gate, took pity on him. Solomon thought he had seen him before, in the days of his glory, but he betrayed nothing of this. And the old man spoke to him, saying :

" Come into my dwelling at the foot of the ramparts. Thou shalt eat with my sons, and with my sons' sons."

As they went along the road together he sought to comfort him :

" All misery hath an end," said he ; " mine, in days

long gone, was far greater than thine. And nowadays I live happily enough."

Solomon, already less wretched, thought in his heart :

" As in the water, face answereth face, so sometimes, among men, heart speaketh to heart."

But the old man went on :

" I cannot offer thee a repast like unto those of King Solomon. I saw him once, in all his glory. How beautiful he was, and how magnificent in his golden palace, when all the kings of the earth bowed down before his throne, when all the people of the earth came to consult the words of his mouth."

And the beggar felt a tear coursing down his cheek.

Now, when they were arrived, the old man took out of his pocket a woollen bag. And it was full of holes and very dirty. But he washed it in the well, and, behold, it was filled with fish. And he dried the bag upon a rock. And straightway the rock was covered with fragrant dates.

And they sat down to eat. But Solomon could not eat. For he was lost among memories that multiplied his sorrow.

" Wherefore dost thou not eat, comrade ? " asked the old man. " Dost thou fear something malign in the miracle which giveth us every day our daily bread ? Fear not. Eat in peace. It is to King Solomon that thou owest the appeasing of thy hunger. When I went to make supplication to him aforetime, he bent down and murmured the word 'wisdom' into this empty bag. And straightway it was filled with an invisible treasure. This treasure I have

yet. Thou seest that we eat of it and it is not exhausted. Therefore share with us its benefits. Then thou shalt do even as I did, and go up to the king, in his marble city, demanding succour. He can do all things. And he refuseth nothing. Evil men say in these days that he hath lost his wisdom. But I know not how to believe that. How shall he save us if he hath not kept his wisdom ? "

Then, without having touched either fish or dates, Solomon rose up. And, bowing his trembling head above his tottering legs, and leaning upon his trembling staff, he departed.

And he journeyed a long time, from day to day gleaning grapes from the vines, and eating stray ears of corn that were left in the corners of the fields. For he desired to leave the land of Israel behind him, and to flee in the shadow of his footsteps from the shadow of his life.

One night he drew near to Erech, in the land of Shinar. He lay down to sleep among the rocks. And, as he slept, a noise awoke him. He saw a man digging the earth. And the man drew a sack out of the earth, closed the hole again, then went off into the distance with the clinking of gold upon his shoulders.

On the morrow, when he went in to the city, Solomon was seized by the guards, who searched him and beat him, chained his wrists with iron chains and dragged him before the seat of the judge.

Three men were standing there, demanding justice. And, so soon as he appeared, one of them, pointing at him with his finger, cried out :

" This is the vagabond, I recognise him."

" Where hast thou hidden the gold?" said the judge.

" What gold ? "

" The gold that thou hast stolen this night," answered the man who accused him. " It belonged to me and to my two brethren here. We buried it in the ground before leaving the country. And, being returned again with them, I was going in search of it, in order to give them their portions, when I met thee. And when I dug in the hole I saw that the treasure had disappeared."

" It is thou who hast stolen it," replied Solomon. " I was asleep, and with thy digging thou didst awaken me. And as thou didst depart I heard the gold clinking upon thy back."

" Why should I rob myself of mine own treasure ? " scoffed the man. " I, whose wife is the sister of the judge, am I the thief? "

" Thou hast stolen, and the judge is thine accomplice," cried Solomon.

" Let him be whipped," ordered the judge, " and then put him to the torture till he confess."

They lashed his body with leathern cords, they screwed his nails in wooden bolts, they roasted his feet in burning flames. And, as he would confess nothing, the guards carried him off and chained him by his feet and by his neck to the walls of the prison.

Then he cried aloud :

" Happy are the dead above the living, who live under the sun to see iniquity. But happier than the living or the dead are they who have never lived, who have never been born. For they know not the injustice of men, through whom the injustice of God reigneth upon earth."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LORD'S BETROTHED

Thus Solomon suffered, wretched among the wretched. And his companions were chained upright along the four walls of the prison, like four rows of groaning statues. He questioned them. Some deserved their captivity. But many were not guilty.

One answered him, saying : " A rich man coveted my field."

Another : " A powerful man coveted my wife."

The third said : " I defended an innocent man against a judge."

The fourth : " I found a prince to be a criminal."

And Solomon cried aloud :

" Cursed be creation that grindeth the poor: and may the Creator, who exalteth the wicked, be accursed."

Once a day the gaoler poured a broth thickened with garbage into vessels which were fixed at the height of their mouths. And, like beasts in the stable, the prisoners leaned over their portions and devoured them.

And Solomon thought in his heart :

" When I was enthroned upon my throne in Jerusalem, believing that I dispensed justice throughout the world, did those who sat in judgment in my name, in my cities, in my provinces, and in my kingdoms,

persecute the weak and fortify the strong? If this is indeed so, I prefer sadness to laughter, and the house of mourning to that of joy."

Every night the cell was filled with nightmares. To the left of Solomon, his neighbour in misery pulled at his chains, which grated in his slumber. To the right of Solomon, his comrade in misery shivered all over. And in his shivering his chains shivered also, and his teeth chattered with fever.

After a month, out of this pit of darkness, Solomon saw go up in a dream his palace, his amphitheatre, and his festivals. Then he murmured :

" Unrighteousness hath enchained me here for a theft that I have not committed But have I not committed other crimes a thousand times worse, for which no payment was exacted? I heaped gold upon gold, horses upon horses, women upon women. I defiled my body with inchastities, my power with war, and my wisdom with idols. I desired to raise myself above men. And, behold, I am sunk lower than the beasts."

After three months, from the pit of darkness, he saw go up in his dream his brother Adonijah, and after him Shimei, his master. Then he murmured in his heart :

" Liveth there but one good man who shall do good always, who shall not backslide? Even in the days when I was still undefiled I said : ' The wrath of a king is like unto a roaring lion, and his favour is as dew upon the grass.' But I struggled not against wrath, and was it mercy that mine eyes called equity? Did I not make my brother Adonijah to perish

because he loved the Shulamite, whom also I loved? Did I not slay Shimei my master because he yet served the God whom I abandoned?"

And after six months, he saw go up in a dream from the pit of darkness, David his father. And, in his dream, David his father sang upon his terrace at home. And, waking beneath his fingers, his harp sang:

"Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul: Who killeth and giveth life; Who chastiseth where He loveth, and giveth pardon unto them that repent.

"All thine actions shall be summoned before His justice, the evil actions and the good, both they that are known and they that are hidden.

"Wherefore remember Him before the light of the sun is darkened. And before dust returneth again unto dust, and the ghost is one with the Holy Ghost."

Then Solomon murmured in his heart:

"By mine own folly have I spoiled my life. And I have blasphemed against the Master of Life. It is my sins that have pushed me into the pit of my expiations. The iniquity of man exerciseth upon me the justice of God. For man maketh question of life, shaking lots in the urn. But the answer that is given proceedeth from the Eternal. Man saddles his horse for combat, but the Eternal giveth the victory. Behold, I had power and I had wisdom. Who leaneth on his own wisdom is a fool. Who leaneth upon his own power is but a weak man. He alone is wise and powerful who seeketh God in his heart. But, alas, when a man hath lost Him, how may he find God again?"

And day after day, night after night, while his

companions wept and groaned about him, Solomon murmured :

" To find God ! To find God ! "

Now, after a year, to the right of him his neighbour in misery died, and to the left of him died his neighbour in misery. And, round their two bodies that were left to rot in their chains, floated the odour of pestilence. And Solomon thought :

" I said, ' He who is bowed under a burden shall not be relieved, neither shall he that is twisted stand upright. Naught changeth under the sun.' But since, from the pure man that I was, I am become impure, may I not, before my last hour, from the unclean thing that I am, be whole and clean again ? "

And, as he pondered these thoughts in his heart, behold, the chains fell off silently from his feet and his neck. And the wall was not opened, yet he passed through it.

And he went his way by night and by day, murmuring :

" Penitence ! Penitence ! Penitence ! "

Now, the fallen king no longer stretched out his hand for alms. But he lent his body to humble labour. And he prayed thus :

" Lord, give me neither wealth nor poverty. Deign only to accord me my daily bread, lest in abundance, as in utter want, I chance to forget Thee, saying, ' Who is the Eternal ? ' "

And first he worked at sowing of corn and ploughing the furrow. And when he wakened at dawn he thought :

" Fullness taketh from the rich man his repose. But sweet is the sleep of the labourer."

And he comforted the hope in his soul with words of encouragement :

" Who watcheth the wind, which way it bloweth, shall not sow. Neither shall he reap who regardeth the clouds. Do the work that lieth to thy hand in the morning. And in the evening let not thy hand be idle. Thou knowest not where thou shalt succeed. Leave to God the fruit of thy toil."

Next he became a mason. And, mixing his mortar and handling his trowel, he said again :

" To work ; no respite. To work. For indolence is the reason why the scaffolding falleth in. For the careless hand poureth water upon the house."

And the hut that he builded without the aid of the spirits seemed to him more glorious even than his palace.

Then he took service with a tanner, thinking :

" To earn a wage, skin a carrion in the public place. Say not ' I am called Solomon, this is work too humble for a king.' For work is great, and work honoureth the labourer greatly. It draweth nearer to God than idle worship."

And always and in every place, when his task was done, he found a man poorer than himself, and shared with him his bread.

And when he had wandered thus from place to place, doing now one kind of work and now another, after a space of close on two years, he cried aloud :

" What miracle, Lord, hast Thou accomplished ! Thou gavest me all things and I rejected Thy gifts. Thou didst deprive me of them, and, behold, I know

their price. Seeking joy I found but disgust. But in seeking repentance, behold, I have found joy."

When he was come into the land of Ammon, he was herdsman of a flock. Now one day, as he sat upon a stone, his staff in his hand, he watched his sheep, and, behold, he heard behind a little thicket of trees a shepherdess singing :

" King David sleeps,
But my heart waketh.
Where art thou, my beloved ?
Whither art thou gone ? "

And he thought in his heart :

" Is this thing possible ? The song that I wrote in the morning of my youth, singing the loves of the Shulamite and her shepherd, doth it wander now upon strange lips, as my feet wander upon strange soil ? "

And the shepherdess sang again :

" King David sleeps,
But my heart waketh . . ."

" Yea," thought Solomon, " King David, indeed, sleeps in death. And my heart, my heart waketh still in life."

And the shepherdess sang again :

" Where art thou, my beloved ?
Whither art thou gone ? "

" Where art Thou, Lord," thought Solomon ; ' whither art Thou gone, beloved of my soul ? "

And still she sang :

" Wilt thou go up into thy garden,
To the beds of anemones,
To feed thy flock,
And to gather lilies ?
Wilt thou go down into the garden of nut-trees,
To see the young shoots of the valley ? "

And Solomon thought :

" Lord, Lord, wilt Thou go down into the valley of my tears to see the tender shoots that put forth in the garden of my repentance ? "

" As an apple tree among the trees of the wood,

sang the shepherdess,

So is my beloved among the young men.
His head is as most fine gold.
His locks are bushy,
And black as a raven.
His eyes are as the eyes of doves,
By the rivers of waters.
His cheeks are beds of spices.
His lips are roses.
Why art thou not there ? Why art thou not come,
my beloved ?
Ah, that I might know the kisses of thy mouth."

" Why art Thou not there, Lord ? " echoed Solomon, " Why art Thou not there, my soul's beloved ? Ah, that my soul might know the kisses of Thy mouth . . . "

And the shepherdess sang again. And Solomon asked himself :

" Is this in truth the song that I made ? For I know it not, and yet I know it. Did another love lie hidden beneath the love that so made me suffer ? A love stronger than death, because its fulfilment liveth not, but in death ? "

Sitting upon his stone, he did not move. He waited, if haply he might better understand those words that in other days he had written without understanding.

And, behold, after a silence, the voice of a shepherd sang in his turn :

"Rise up, my love, my fair one.
Open to me my fair one. Arise and come away."

"Is it God who answereth ?" asked Solomon. "Is it my soul, is it even my soul that the Lord calleth ?"

And the shepherd sang on

"Come away, my fair one,
for lo ! the winter is past.
The rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth.
The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs,
The vines, with the tender grapes,
Give a good smell.
And the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in the land."

"Is the winter of my disgrace past ?" asked Solomon again. "Are the tears of my trial over and gone ? Do the flowers of pardon indeed appear in the skies ? Doth mercy put forth her fruits, and grace give forth sweet perfumes ? And is the voice of the dove of salvation heard in my soul ?"

And the shepherd sang again :

"Thou hast ravished my heart,
My beloved,
With a glance of thine eyes,
Thou hast ravished my heart :
How fair are thy caresses, my love,
Yea, fairer than wine.
Thy lips distil the sweetness of the honeycomb.
The scent of thy garments
Is as the scent of Lebanon."

And Solomon asked again :

" Is it true, Lord, that my soul hath touched Thy heart ? That the prayer of my soul is fair as a caress to Thee ? Is her praise a delight to Thee ? And her repentance as a perfume ? "

And the shepherd, as though the Lord had charged him with His answer, sang again :

" Thou art come, my beloved, thou art come.
Thy left hand is under my head,
And thy right doth embrace me. . . .
My beloved is mine, and I am his."

And Solomon, in his turn, sang in his joy :

" Thou art come, Thou art come, Lord, Thy left hand is under the thought of my heart. And Thy right doth embrace my soul. My Lord is mine, and I am His."

And thus, when he became a shepherd, Solomon discovered in *The Song of Songs* the loves of his soul with the Eternal, whose bride is the soul of Israel for ever and for ever.

Now, on the morrow, while he yet slept, forgotten voices came about him :

" Waken to God, sleepers of the night," cried the cock.

And the swallow answered :

" Praise God, praise God, who wakeneth the world."

" Sleepers of the night, awake to the world," cried the cock.

And the swallow gave answer :

" Praise the world, praise the world, which awakeneth to God."

And Solomon heard them. And he rejoiced in his heart with exceeding joy. For, behold, once again he understood the tongues of birds.

CHAPTER XXV

NAAMAH'S CHOICE

Now Solomon, in these days, gained his bread as a porter in the streets of Rabbath-Ammon, in the land of Ammon. But his burdens were light to his shoulders, for he carried God in his heart.

One morning the king's cook, having completed his purchases in the market outside the town, loaded Solomon's back with sacks. And Solomon followed him towards the palace.

"Thou followest a hard trade, poor man," remarked the cook.

"Man takes from the poor," answered Solomon. "And sometimes the matter turneth out to his profit. Man giveth to the rich, and oftentimes he is impoverished. Wherefore, in the day of thy happiness, be contented. And in the day of misfortune, cry not out against it."

The cook was much struck by this remark, and in his pleasure he said :

"If thou desirest, thou mayest take service with me. Thy labour will be less and thy wage much greater."

And Solomon thought :

"A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth. And in the increase of his lips shall he be filled."

And he lived henceforth, drawing water for the king's kitchens.

Now Shobi, the King of Ammon, had a daughter as wise as she was beautiful. And her name was called Naamah. And Naamah shared the repasts of Shobi, her father.

One day, the cook being weary, Solomon proposed to him :

" Dost thou not desire me to prepare the dishes of the king to-day ? "

The cook agreed to this. And Solomon prepared the dishes. And, beneath his hand, God seasoned the dishes.

" What is this delightful savour," said Naamah, when she partook thereof, " with which the food is salted to-day ? "

" The food hath the same taste as it hath every day," answered Shobi.

" No," replied Naamah, " I taste some strange delicacy in it."

Then the king called the cook and questioned him :

" Who prepared the dishes to-day ? "

" A poor man who draweth water for my lord the king's cook."

" Henceforward let him always dress the meals."

And Solomon, henceforward, spread over the repasts of the king the blessing of the Holy One, blessed be He. And Naamah felt it. But Shobi felt it not at all.

Now, just as Solomon had done formerly, Shobi sat every morning upon his throne of justice. And,

while he gave judgment, his daughter sat at the foot of his throne and listened. Mindful of his past decrees, Solomon often hid himself among the crowd in the doorways, hearkening to the decrees of this king.

One day two men presented themselves and claimed the justice of Shobi. The first said :

" I entrusted to this man here a pearl. And he refuseth to render it to me again."

" I have already rendered the pearl," affirmed the other ; " I have it no longer."

" Who are your witnesses ? " demanded the king.

" We have none."

" Then let each of ye swear upon oath three times that he hath not the pearl."

And the first man swore three times :

" By my life and by my father's life, I swear that I have not the pearl."

And, as he sware, he raised his right hand in token of faith.

And three times the other man raised his right hand and sware :

" Upon my life and upon my son's life, I swear that I have not the pearl."

But each time, before he raised his right hand, the last man gave one of the guard who stood near him a stick that he held in his hands.

Shobi could by no means detect the innocent man from the guilty. And he was about to send them both away.

But, as in the days of his childhood, when David, his father, was seated upon the throne in the Hall of the Pillars of Cedar Wood, and faltered in his

judgment, Solomon made bold to speak. Going out from the throng, he bowed low and said :

" Will the king, my master, deign to permit his servant to point out the guilty man ? "

All waited, surprised at his audacity.

" Point him out, if thou canst," answered the king.

" This is he," said Solomon, pointing to the man who held the stick.

" What is thy proof ? " asked Shobi.

" Three times, in order to swear ' I have not the pearl,' he divested himself of the stick that he holdeth in his hand. Let my lord the king make examination of the stick."

The king took the stick from the man. He made examination of it. And, lo ! the stick was hollow, and contained the pearl.

Then all marvelled at Solomon's subtlety. But Naamah saw his face, and, all undone by suffering as it was, yet she found it beautiful. For the spirit adorneth the face of man.

Another day, two other men came to plead their case before the king. And the first man said :

" Behold, it is twenty years since, leaving my four little brothers, I quitted the house of my father and went out into the world to seek my fortune. My father died. This man here was his slave. He took my name, the title to my inheritance. And to-day he liveth rejoicing in my possessions."

Then the second man said :

" I am the legitimate son, the legitimate heir. He who bringeth accusation against me is the impostor."

" Who are thy witnesses," demanded the king of the plaintiff.

" Alas, I have none, lord. My brothers knew me not again. And our neighbours are dead."

Not knowing how to discover which of the two lied, Shobi would have dismissed the one with the other. But Naamah perceived Solomon, who hid among the crowd of those who were assembled in the doorways. Then said she to the king :

" Let my lord the king consult the wise man. Of a surety he will know how to discover the truth."

And, when Shobi consulted him, Solomon asked :

" Where is the father's corpse buried ? Let one go hence and bring hither again one of his bones."

And, when the bone was brought, Solomon ordered :

" Let twelve times twelve drops of blood be drawn from the arm of each of these men."

The thing was done. Solomon rubbed the bone with the blood of the accused, and the bone whitened. And it remained white. Then he rubbed the bone with the blood of the accuser. And behold the bone grew red.

" This blood is the son of that bone," said Solomon.

All marvelled at his wisdom. But Naamah saw how his face shone, notwithstanding it was all undone with weariness. For the light of God illuminateth the countenance of man.

And henceforth the daughter of the king ceased not, night and day, to think on Solomon.

" What is this poor man," thought she, " whose back is bent, whose hands spill delicacies, whose

mouth spreadeth the clarities of wisdom, whose forehead is glorious with light ? "

One day he had drawn water for the kitchens from the well in the garden. And after he had carried in the water, he returned. And he lay down in the shade of the tower to take his noonday sleep. Through the lattice of her window Naamah regarded him.

Now, while he slept, Naamah saw two lions come down from the mountains and post themselves, one to the right of him, and one to the left. And with the continual waving of their tails they kept off the flies who would have disturbed his slumber.

When he awakened he cried aloud :

" Praise be to the Eternal."

Then Naamah asked him :

" How canst thou sleep peacefully between two savage beasts ? "

" Savage beasts, like savage men, are within the regiment of God," answered Solomon. And he returned again to the place of his labours.

On the morrow she saw two serpents, who lulled his slumbers with their low hissing. And the day after, two eagles who fanned him with their unfurled wings. And each time, as he awakened, he cried aloud :

" Praise be to the Eternal."

" Who is this Eternal ? " Naamah asked him, " of whom thou singest the name ? "

" He is the one God to whom all earth and the skies belong, and all power and all wisdom."

" I have heard tell," answered Naamah, " that wisdom and power, the earth and the skies, belong to King Solomon."

" Solomon believed so once," replied Solomon. " But he believeth so no longer."

" Teach me, then, the ways of thy God, and I will be thy wife."

" The king will never consent."

" Yea, he will consent. For he promised to give me in marriage to the husband of my choice."

But, when Naamah told her desire to her father, fury inflated his nostrils. And he raised his sceptre to strike the head of the husband that she had chosen.

And Solomon looked upon Shobi. And he moved not at all. Then he murmured :

" Anger inhabiteth the breast of fools."

The hand let fall the sceptre, and, turning towards Naamah, Shobi cried :

" So be it. Be the wife of a vagabond. I keep my word. But I chase thee out of my kingdom, and out of my heart."

Naamah answered not a word. But, leaving her royalty and her father, she went down out of the palace, and followed Solomon into the wilderness.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE REIGN OF ASMODEUS

But Asmodeus, having taken the likeness of Solomon, reigned in his stead over Israel. Yet, notwithstanding his ascendancy, he went in fear of discovery from the first.

In the days of the true Solomon there had been a staff of ivory in a corner of the Sanctuary. If the descendant of a Prophet took it in his hand, his hand went unhurt. But if another touched it, his hand was burned.

Moreover, in the days of the true Solomon there had been in the interior of the Sanctuary a translucent wall. If a just man passed before it, the wall remained translucent. But if an unrighteous man passed before it, the wall was darkened.

But in these days every hand that took hold on the the staff, no matter whose it was, burned. And, no matter who passed before the wall, the wall grew dark. And every man asked of his neighbour :

" Shall there no longer be found one just man in Israel ? Is there no longer in Israel the hope of a Prophet ? "

On that night, when the two golden Cherubim had carried the sacred Ark up into the sky, Asmodeus had directed his demons to replace them in the Holy of Holies with images of two other Cherubim,

sheltering beneath the image of wings the image of another Ark.

But, in the days of the true Solomon, when the priests had finished their ministering and the people raised their voices toward the Lord, the true Ark had been wont to rise with the prayer above the earth, showing before the eyes of all men that the prayer was received and accepted. But in these days, how fervent soever were the supplications of Zadok the High Priest, or of the sons of Levi, or of those of the twelve tribes who had remained faithful and spurned the idolatries prescribed by the king, the false Ark remained firm and motionless upon the earth. And every man asked his neighbour :

" Is there no longer a God over Israel ? "

In order that all these changes which might betray him should be forgotten, Asmodeus gave it out as his will that no man henceforth should enter the Temple. And to this purpose he had all the knowledge of the banished king engraven upon the marble exterior of the Temple.

" If each man," he said to himself, " learn, as he reads the writing on the wall, the fruits that nourish and those that poison, the juices that revive and the saps that kill, the talismans, the charms, and the spells that rout disease, the mingling of minerals from which fine gold may be extracted, the rays of the crystals that bring good fortune—if he learn and know these things, he will have nothing left to ask of the Eternal. So shall His Sanctuary be soon deserted."

And, indeed, old men and the infirm, unhappy children and sterile women, they who were ambitious

of reward, of riches, of power or happiness, halted as they went up, to read aloud the profane remedies, instead of throwing wide the doors of salvation and seeking within the remedies of the Lord.

Yet many, when they had made an end of reading, entered in with their prayers. For they thought :

" To the help of man it is better to add the help of God."

And the demon feared lest God should reveal to men the secret of the demon.

Nevertheless, after due time had elapsed, Asmodeus said to himself :

" Is there in truth any need to appear a holy man in order to imitate Solomon ? Did he not cover the whole face of Israel with his sins ? And should I not resemble him more closely if I imitated myself rather than the Most High ? "

Then, just as the true Solomon, effacing from his heart the name of the Eternal, had let himself sink from revel to revel, from debauch to debauch, from folly to folly, the false Solomon, effacing from his forehead the seal of Solomon, let himself fall from orgy to orgy, from lust to lust, from madness to madness.

Now, at these festivals the poor no longer had their wooden tables, nor the princes their tables of crystal, nor the doctors, the Levites, and the priests their tables of carbuncle. But the demons, unchained now, ate alone with Asmodeus at tables of diamond.

Where Solomon for his kitchens had dug in the valley a vat as broad as a lake, and had lighted upon the mountain a brazier as high as a hill, Asmodeus

dug a vat vaster than the sea. And he lighted a brazier taller than the heavens.

And, as sheep and kine, hind and hart, would no longer of their own accord bring their flesh to the trencher ; neither would the birds from all the horizons fly thither to roast themselves upon the spits ; and as fruit from all climates would no longer fall into the baskets —he made the black shadow of his wings to whirl about the whole Creation, and he gathered in by thousands and by myriads, as in a net whose meshes would contain the world itself, harvest and vintage, and birds of the air, and beasts of the earth and of the waters.

But the true Solomon dwelt in the wilderness with Naamah. And for their only food, every morning and every evening, an eagle of the sky threw down to them bread baked by the angels.

Now, the three hundred concubines and the seven hundred wives of the exile were not enough for the pleasures of the demon who replaced him. And he added to them innumerable she-devils, the children of darkness, evil ghosts and shades whose embraces are slow agonies ; witches and banshees, whose clasp is as heavy as death ; vampires and ghouls, who suck blood as they take their sensual pleasures.

But the true Solomon dwelt in the wilderness with Naamah. And he slept beside her, couched beneath the stars—a brother by the side of a sister. For he did not wish to unite himself to her purity, before the Torah had made her doubly pure.

The very idols that the Sage, turned madman, had

worshipped seemed too innocent to the Madman who came after him. Not content with that night when he had seen the gods of the dust rise from the hollows of the valleys, and from the summits of the green mountains, from all the places sanctified by the Ark and by the Patriarchs ; not content that they had defiled the basin of bronze with their filth, and the altars of bronze and of gold with their obscene dances, he fixed them, pressed one against the other, like the stocks of a vineyard, upon all the slopes of Mount Moriah. And he planted them, pressed one against the other, like blades of corn in the courts and porches of the Holy Dwelling. And in the Sanctuary he committed fornication and adultery for Ishtar; and in the Holy of Holies, for Moloch's sake, he threw all firstborn children into the flames of his fiery jaw.

But the true Solomon dwelt in the wilderness with Naamah. And every morning, and every evening, he recited this prayer :

" Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is One."

Now, at the end of forty days, when he had completed her instruction in the Torah, the eagle ceased to throw bread from the skies for their food. And they left the wilderness and journeyed until they came to the shores of the sea.

A fisherman was drawing his net out upon the bank. Solomon drew near and lent him a hand. And for his wage the fisherman gave him a fish.

" May the Lord render it to thee again," said Solomon, " but I have a woman here whom I must feed. Give me, I pray thee, another fish for her."

And the fisherman gave him another. And it was smaller than the first. When Naamah had boiled them, and Solomon had recited the prayer, they sat down to eat.

" Take the larger," said Solomon, " and I will take the other."

" No, no," answered Naamah, " the larger is for thee. The little one will suffice for me."

But, as she opened it, behold, she perceived within the fish something that shone.

" A miracle ! " she cried.

Solomon looked at it. And, lo ! it was the ring with the four jewels and the name of the Eternal which Asmodeus had hurled into the gulf of the waters. And Solomon spake, saying :

" All things are in the hands of the Eternal."

And, while he slipped the ring on to his finger, a voice sang from the heights :

" Thou hast retrieved thy wisdom. Let power also be rendered to thee again."

And straightway the four winds blew. And, in the whirlwinds of their breath, spirits whirled, bearing robes and mantles of many hues, and perfumed sweetmeats in vessels of gold.

And when Naamah and Solomon, clothed in their new raiment, had seated themselves again, behold a cloud went down out of heaven, wherein shone the light of sapphire, of opal, of amethyst, of topaz, of onyx, of agate, of jasper, and of chrysolite, of emerald, chrysoprase, carbuncle, and diamond. And enveloping them together, the one with the other, in the twelvefold radiance of its light, it rose from the earth and bore them into space.

But Benaiah, the servant of Solomon, looked upon the sacrileges of Asmodeus in horror. And he thought in his heart :

" However greatly my lord the king may have sinned, these sins are too black for him to have committed them."

And suspecting that a demon had taken his place, he questioned one after another the three hundred concubines and the seven hundred wives, saying :

" Have ye seen the foot of the king ? " and all made answer :

" For nights and for nights he hath hidden his foot from us."

" That is because his foot is cloven," said Benaiah to himself. And he went to find Zadok the High Priest. And the two laid their heads together and decided :

" With the help of the Sanhedrin we will confound the impostor."

Now on this very day the false Solomon wished, according to his custom, to mount upon the throne of Solomon. And, according to his custom, the lion of iron cried :

" Just are the precepts of the Eternal." But he did not give his paw to the iron bull. And Asmodeus could not ascend the step of iron. And the panther of brass cried :

" Pure are the commandments of the Eternal." But she did not give her paw to the ram of brass. And Asmodeus could not ascend the step of brass. And the leaden wolf would not give his paw to the leaden sheep, nor would the bronze bear, nor the copper elephant, nor the silver griffin, nor the sparrowhawk of gold, give paws, or talons, or wings, to the bronze

gazelle, the copper ass, the silver phœnix, and the dove of gold.

And when the Cherubim of gold cried aloud : " Eternal is the Law of the Eternal," all they of the Sanhedrin came forward, and each one had traced upon his breast the name of the Eternal. And they surrounded Asmodeus, who grovelled beneath the throne, wishing by seventy times seven to flee from the Eternal.

But, behold, a cloud sank down out of the heights. And, from the twelvefold radiance of the cloud that fell about them like veils, a man and woman came forth clothed in light. And a hand raised a sparkling ring to the sky, and the false Solomon, crying and yelling, fell down in the dust and licked the feet of Solomon.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE RETURN OF THE PENITENT

On his return from exile, wishing to punish Asmodeus by imprisonment, the king commanded :

" Let a crystal bottle be brought hither." And, the moment he set eyes on it, the demon, in order to escape, towered up until he touched the sky. But Solomon stretched forth his hand upon which the ring shone. And straightway, like a black cloud which is swallowed into the mouth of the wind, Asmodeus shrank to the ground and disappeared into the lips of the flask.

The king stoppered the opening with a leaden stopper. And then, whirling the captive demon seven times in the air at arm's length, he hurled him over mountain and plain, into the water of the ocean.

And, ever since, Asmodeus floats among the waves in his floating bottle. And he will float there, even until the Day of Judgment. Often he sleeps, and his slumbers calm the sea to blue. But, when his awakened rage agitates and rocks his narrow prison, the sea darkens her waves afar off, and hurricanes lash the deep into mighty tempests.

Now, Naamah said unto Solomon :

" Shall not thy handmaid now become the wife of my lord the king ? "

" I waited," he answered, " until the Torah should have doubly purified thy purity. Wait thou, while I wash away the defilements with which I have defiled the Torah."

And first, just as men burn the tendrils of a rotten vine, he burned all the gods of the dust, with whose corruption all the slopes of the Moriah were corrupted. And next, as men cut off a harvest that is poisoned by blight, he cut away the idols from the courts and the porches. And lastly, as men perfume and make sweet places that have been plagued by pestilence, he perfumed with incense and with balms the Sanctuary and the Holy of Holies.

Then the sham Ark which the demon had made sank like a shadow into the sacred shadows. And the Cherubim, descending slowly from the sky upon their wings of gold, put back the Ark of the Lord in its rightful place.

Now, after he had banished all unclean worships out of Israel, Solomon bethought him of the royal commandments which he had transgressed. For, against the word of the Lord and of David, he had heaped up and multiplied women and horses and gold.

And he himself shut up within her palace each one of his three hundred concubines and his seven hundred wives. And he vowed never to look upon them more, unless to judge some trespass. With his own hands he opened the stables of all his horses. And he yoked them to all his chariots, which he had laden with all his riches. And, under the lash of the charioteers,

they departed at a gallop, west, east, south, and north, to assuage the ills of all the poor in the world.

And at last, upon the altar of bronze, he relighted the flame. But, instead of going up like a tall cypress-tree toward the firmament, the smoke once again spread its black leaves out to the four horizons. And it hung between earth and heaven. And they were separated.

Now, behold, Benaiah, the servant of Solomon, appeared before him with four other servants carrying a barrow. And upon this barrow lay the son of the concubine, the only one who had been born to the king by his thousand women. And this son, although he was well-grown, had but one leg, one arm, one tooth, one ear, and one eye.

"Will my lord the king deign now to heal his child?" said Benaiah.

And upon a golden tray he presented to Solomon, that he might consult them, all the works of his hand that he had written: *The Song of Songs*, where, in the days of his youth, he sang his first loves; *The Book of Proverbs*, where, in the strength of his prime, he had written explaining his wisdom; *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, where, during his decline, he had recorded his doubts and his bitterness. And there were those depicting birds, four-footed things, and fish; and those enumerating plants and their health-giving or death-dealing properties. There were those recounting gems and metals which are good for weakness or strength, sorrow or joy. And this *Key of Solomon* opened all the treasures of magic arts. And this *Ring of Solomon* contained all the gestures by which spirits may be

tamed. And *The Testament of Solomon* named all demons by name, and recited all spells and incantations that rout them or draw them hither, expel them or provoke their malice.

And, as Benaiah for the second time said :

" Will not my lord the king deign now to heal his child ? "

Solomon made answer :

" Throw them all into the flame upon the altar ; even my loves and my fears, my wisdom and my knowledge. To heal my child, as to save the world, prayer sufficeth."

And Benaiah took and threw into the flame all the writings of Solomon. And the fire slowly unrolled the parchments. And the parchments began slowly to burn. But the smoke, spread out toward the four horizons, still divided heaven from earth.

Then the king sware an oath :

" Until the hour when the earth again is joined to the sky, I shall fast, in tears and lamentation."

And he fasted forty days. And forty nights he wept.

Now, the flame upon the altar had not eaten a single word of *The Proverbs*, nor of *Ecclesiastes*, nor of *The Song of Songs*. And these parchments were retrieved out of the ashes, without so much as a bite on the edge of them. For the Eternal wished to preserve them, that they might later light His flame in the hearts of men. But, after forty days and forty nights, when the books of knowledge and those of magic were utterly wiped away from the walls of the Temple, and even to their last line consumed in the fire, then, behold, the smoke suddenly returned from the horizons. And it went upright again to heaven like

a cypress-tree springing from the altar. And the space between heaven and earth was clear.

Then Solomon prayed. And in his repentance he composed eighteen psalms. And his prayer went up with the smoke. And with the smoke the prayer once again united earth to heaven.

He sang :

" Happy is he whom the Lord hath remembered to take unto himself again. Happy is he whose face the Lord hath turned away from evil with blows of the whip.

" For the work of man dependeth upon the choice of his soul. But, when he accuseth himself, God hath pity on him. And unto whom shall God show pardon if it be not to the sinner ?

He sang again :

" Give me light, to lighten my darkness, Lord."

And, behold, as he sang, the son of his sin, which the concubine had borne him, had two eyes to see.

And he sang again :

" I hear Thy voice, Lord ; nourish me with Thy words."

And, behold, the son of his sin had two ears to hear, and a mouth with teeth that he might eat.

" Let my right hand and my left hand be raised up to adore thee, Lord,"

sang the Penitent ;

" let my two feet walk continually in Thy ways."

And as he sang, behold, the son of his sin, which the concubine had borne him, had two arms that he might embrace, and two legs that he might run.

Then said Solomon to Naamah :

" Come, now ; and be my wife, that we may create a son. If I have not known how to be the Messiah, let our son be He, or his son, or his son's son, or the son of his son. For every man in his heart may become the Messiah. And his heart alone hindereth him from being the anointed of the Lord."

Now, to make festival upon the nuptial day, all the demons of water, earth, and air, together with all the spirits that dwell below and all they who dwell above, appeared before the king, crying :

" At thy service, at thy service, King Solomon. Wilt thou that we go to discover in the deeps more gold than thou hast put away ? Or shall we bring thee from distant lands more delights than thou hast yet known ? Must we cull stars, from the meadows of the firmament, for thy jewels ; or thunderbolts for thy quiver ? Shall we distil, for the body of her whom thou cherishest, myrrh and balm that dispense salvation ? Or shall we rack the bones of thine enemies with cramps and fevers, deliriums and frenzies ? Command us as it please thee, for good or ill. We are thy slaves : the universe belongeth unto thee."

But the Penitent answered them :

" What have I to do with the demons, when I have repentance ? "

And he had a deep and mighty pit dug in the Valley of Hinnom. And then he ordered them, saying :

" Go down into it ! "

And, when the demons had gone down into it, he sealed the pit with a stone. And he sealed the stone with the seal of the Eternal.

Then at last, when he had renounced the seven vanities which had turned away his soul from its paths, Solomon reigned in peace over Israel. And he was feeble before God, and strong in God alone.

And, like David before him, he closed his days clad in sackcloth and with ashes upon his head for repentance' sake. And, behold, in this time the wolf browsed by the lamb, the vulture nested by the turtle dove, the sword was changed into the ploughshare, and the spear into the reaping-hook. And every man from Dan even to Beersheba lived in happiness and content, under the shadow of his own vine and his own fig-tree.

Now, behold, a sound like a little brook rose in the Temple. And beneath the Temple a faint noise of hammering was heard. From the golden grapes planted in the Sanctuary the divine blood ran once again toward the depths where the scattered bones of Adam were perishing. And the heart of man, buried in the stone upon which the foundations of the world were set, began to beat anew.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE WATCHER IN THE SEPULCHRE

Now Solomon in the days of his age ruled over Israel. And in the light of his own repentance he judged plants and beasts and men. But he no longer made question of transitory things. For his whole study, in these days, was the Torah.

Now as he pondered the Torah continually both day and night, behold, he began to discover, one by one, the hidden meanings of the six hundred and thirteen commandments which the Eternal had given to Moses, our Master, in flame on Mount Sinai. But Moses, when he delivered the words of the Torah unto the children of Israel, had by no means made explanation of these matters. Wherefore Solomon explained them with commentary and question to Benaiah his servant. And he taught him, saying :

" Unto what shall we liken the hidden meanings of the words of the Torah ? Unto a well whose living waters lie buried so far within its depths that no man may drink thereof. What doth a wise man in such a plight ? He knotteth cord unto cord until at length he may draw the waters up in the bucket. Then may he drink. In like manner, therefore, have I added meaning unto meaning, until I have been able to draw up and understand the words written down by Moses,

our Master. And, behold, I will expound unto thee that which I have understood."

But the Torah hides mysteries, also, that were not fully clear even to Moses. For each word of the Torah holds a thousand meanings. And each letter of the Torah has a thousand secrets. Now, as he pondered these words and these letters continually both day and night, behold, Solomon discovered the truth of them, one after another. And in story and parable he revealed what he had discovered unto Benaiah his servant, saying :

" Unto what shall we liken the mysteries hidden in the words and in the letters of the Torah ? Unto a treasure of pearl that is laid away in the cellar of an house. And no man may find them, by reason of the darkness in the cellar. What doth a wise man in such a plight ? He weaveth one strand of tow with another strand, until he hath the thickness of a wick. This he lighteth. And by means of the wick that is worth no more than a farthing, he findeth the treasure of pearl that is worth a king's ransom. In like manner, therefore, have I woven one story with another story. And these have not value. But, with the light that springeth from them, have I found the hidden mysteries of the Torah. And I will reveal them unto thee, for the mysteries of the Torah are more precious than pearls."

But certain of the people came to find Solomon. And they demanded of him, saying :

" Wherefore dost thou hide from us the meanings of the commandments and the mysteries of the Torah, seeing thou teachest them to Benaiah thy servant ? "

And Solomon answered them :

" The Holy One, blessed be He, explained the

meaning of three of His commandments very clearly in the Torah, namely : ' See that thou entertain not horses and chariots for thy household ' ; ' See that thou have not women in multitudes about thee ' ; and ' See that thou heap not up great store of gold and silver.' Now these three commandments I have utterly understood. For did I not infringe them ? I charge ye that first ye obey the Torah. Then only shall ye seek to understand it. And, when ye have understood it, expound it not except to those who are certain to practise its laws."

Now while Solomon, in the days of his repentance, practised the Torah, a slab of granite was his couch, a block of cypress-wood his pillow.

One day the birds appeared before him. And the hoopoe said :

" King Solomon, once on a time thy heart led thee astray. And wilt thou, therefore, even to thy latest hour, rob thyself of all the blessings wherewith the Lord hath heaped thee ? Beneath the Torah of thy love, all created things gather at thy feet and rejoice with exceeding great joy. Wilt thou alone, then, not grant thy contrition some sweet solace ? "

The king smiled, and answered, saying :

" Let each one of ye bring hither to me a feather of his plumage. And I will make for myself a pillow from them."

And each bird brought a feather. But the flying mouse gave all her plumage. And this is why she flies naked even unto this day, and is called *chauve-souris* or bat. And, to the end that his penitence might not seem to reprove transitory acts of gentleness that are here and are gone again, Solomon henceforth, in the

days of his repentance, slept upon the pillow of feathers that the birds had given him.

Now, one night, with his eyes that were never closed in slumber (for he slept with open eyelids since the day when he again beheld the Eternal), Solomon saw, standing upright before his granite couch, an angel. And the angel had four thousand wings, and seventy thousand feet. And he had as many tongues as there are men upon this earth. His body was covered with eyes. And on the point of his sword a drop of gall grew green.

" Who art thou ? " the Penitent demanded of him.

" Thou hast known all life, King Solomon," answered the angel, " and, behold, now thou must learn death also."

And when he heard these words the king knew the dark angel for Samael. And he said :

" Who hath discovered to thee that mine hour is come ? "

" There is a tree in Paradise," answered the Angel of Death, " whose leaves are numbered in the number of them who dwell upon earth. Each time a child is born a new leaf groweth, whereon the name of the child is written. When he must die, the leaf falleth into death also. I read the name upon it, and I garner in that soul."

" And if the soul will not be garnered ? "

" No power is delivered from me. No man escapeth me, saying, ' Attend but until I am ready ; take another in my place.' So great is my strength that the Creator, when He created me, loaded me with seventy thousand chains, lest I destroy his angels.

And these chains were each of them longer than a road that one might lay down for walking to the distance of seventy thousand years."

" Whence cometh thy power ? "

" From the sins of men. They were born to be immortal. If they sinned not, behold, they would live."

" And by what death dost thou propose that I die ? "

" The ways of dying are to the number of nine hundred and three. But death is always death."

" Whither wilt thou lead me ? "

" Before a Judge mightier than thy justice, King Solomon. At His voice, Adam crieth : ' Lord, Lord, recall Thy pity,' and he thinketh no more on Eve nor Abel. At His voice, Noah crieth : ' Lord, Lord, recall Thy clemency,' and he thinketh no more on Ham or Shem. At His voice, Abraham crieth : ' Lord, Lord, recall Thy mercy,' and he forgetteth alike Isaac and Ishmael."

" This Judge, who is mightier than my justice, doth He reserve a like fate for the good man and for the unrighteous ? "

" The bodies of both go down into the same dust. But the soul of the unrighteous crieth aloud in the night. And the soul of the just man goeth up into the light, to sing beside the knees of the Lord. Even until that day when the Holy One—blessed be He—shall shed His dew upon all bodies and raise them up again in the sound of trumpets that they may be given again to their souls in the Last Judgment."

" On that day, Samael, what will become of thee ? "

" The Messiah will swallow me up before the eye of the Eternal."

" It is death, then, at the last, who dieth ? Life

dieth not? Lord, Lord, when I turned aside from Thy ways, measuring all things in the fear of destruction, I said, 'All is vanity under the sun.' But, since my sin, lo! I am naked of all worldly things, and I know that all things that the Creator made with His hand are good. And I know that death also is the work of His hand, and is good also. Lead me, then, to death, Samael, since death leadeth to immortality. If God succour me, it is good that I be succoured. And if He condemn me to damnation, it is good that I be condemned."

And the destroyer answered:

"To-morrow thou shalt pray thy last prayer in the Temple. And, when thou hast made an end on praying, behold, thou shalt see me again."

Solomon had had, by Naamah, a son named Rehoboam. But Jabel, the son of the concubine, hated Rehoboam. And Rehoboam hated Jabel. For both of them desired the same courtesan.

Now, on the morrow after the night when Samael had appeared unto him, the king went in to the Sanctuary to make his last prayer. And, behold, as he went in, the sound of tumult tore the valley. It was Jabel quarrelling with Rehoboam. And one of them had snatched up a stone from the ground to throw it at the other's forehead. And the stone was the very stone, sealed with the seal of Solomon, which sealed the pit into which all the spirits by his command were descended.

And now, behold, they surged forth from the ditch again: Tephras, who lights the fires of the dog-star; Bulbas, who rides the flood of the equinoctial

tides ; Barak, who shrieks in the storm ; and Kippaon, who is frozen within the ice ; Shekris, who growls in drunkenness ; Mammon, who mumbles in riches ; Onoskelis, who cries in lust ; Klothod, who howls in murder ; and Harpax and Metathiax, and Anoster and Alleborith, and Jeropael and Kunetael, and all they who defile the sinews and the limbs, all they who profane the eye and the ear, and all they who pollute the marrow and the brain. Just as formerly, when David dug the rock with his guilty hand, a wave of mud had gushed forth, so now, beneath the hostile hands of the brothers in fornication, a wave of demons gushed forth. And the wave ran all about Mount Moriah, washing upon its slopes in rivers of darkness. And the rivers deepened to a sea of wickedness and lust. And the sea became an ocean of blood, in which the whole world was about to be swallowed up.

" Is this the fruit of repentance ? " cried Solomon. " When I am here no longer, shall my sin that I sinned be born again ? Then, Lord, what will become of the Temple that my hands have builded for Thee ? What will befall Thee ? "

" I have given thee power and wisdom," answered the Eternal. " Now, in the hour of thy death, receive the gift of prophecy."

And suddenly, as he looked upon the Sanctuary, the eyes of Solomon grew big with the vision of the Prophets. And they knew the Temple no more :

" Alas," he lamented, " what ashes are heaped in this court and these porches ? Who hath rent the hyacinth curtain ? And who hath turned the bronze bath into a lake of blood ? What do these jackals in

the Holy of Holies ? How come these Cherubim wings thus soiled and broken ? Whence creepeth this stench upon the altar of perfumes ? Wherefore do these bodies rot beneath the crumbling pillars ? What wind hath hurled down the golden battlements into the flames ? What tempests have shaken the golden tiles into the smoke ? "

" My son," answered the Eternal, " thy repentance hath found thy pardon. But, after thee, thy sin shall again link thy people with the gods of the dust, whom thou tookest for gods in truth. This is why the Sanctuary, in whose Ark thou didst set My Only Presence, shall fall and crumble stone by stone into the dust."

" Alas, alas," groaned Solomon. " But if in Thy time, indeed, Thou sufferest Thy Temple to be destroyed, wilt Thou not also permit, King of the World, that it be builded again ? "

And, behold, his eyes, grown big with the vision of the Prophets, saw a new Temple going up again upon Mount Moriah. And, in his happiness, he opened his lips and sang :

" O rites of the morning and of the evening ! O cycle of the customary feasts ! Let us praise the Sabbath ! Let us sing Alleluiah beside the paschal lamb ! Fast ye, and repent ye ! hands laid upon the scape-goat that is sent into the wilderness ! Dance all ye candles beneath the porches, for ye foretell the time of the Messiah of the quiet hands. . . ."

But then, of a sudden, he saw how, armoured in iron or coated in leather, carrying sword and the hunting-spear, pushing before them the wild ass, or

engines of destruction, the messengers of fury rushed together. And old men, naked children, women with raiment of all dyes, Levites with their white mitres, were suddenly no more than rubbish that was swept in a crimson tide down the steps. And blue pavements, walls, colonnades, the tall towers, and the lofty roof collapsed and fell like lead into the founder's brazier.

" Wherefore, Lord ? " cried Solomon. " Alas, wherefore ? Were they not punished enough ? What do they now ? Whither go they ? Into what place dost Thou lead them ? Alas, alas ! even as I begged from door to door in my exile, these, exiled in their turn, shall beg from door to door at the houses of the nations ? "

And the Eternal answered :

" Once again they have learnt discord and hate in wars, from which thou didst deliver them, King of Peace ! This is why the Temple, where thy name set the name of My peace, shall a second time go down into dust."

" What ! two Temples, one after the other, Lord ? Two Temples carved in gold and in granite ? Oh, if indeed Thou desirest that the one and the other shall see destruction, let me not die ! Let me live, let me live, King of the World ! That I may build, in the granite of Thy justice and the gold of Thy peace, a Temple mightier than the world ! "

" Thou diest to-day, my son. Thy death is decreed."

" Then, Lord, let me die upright. That, in death, the demons may still believe me living. Lo ! I will command them that they build the Temple invisible. And they, thinking me alive in death, shall build for Thee, at my commandment, even to the end of days."

Now, while he thus made supplication in his last prayer, a hand took his hand without touching it. And seventy thousand steps led his footsteps, without brushing against him, to the holy Ark, in the innermost depths of the Holy of Holies.

And, behold, he went down below the Ark. And with him a sword went down. And at the sword's point a drop of gall grew green.

He went down; he went down. And with him, in his going down, went thousands of eyes, lighting his way.

He went down, he went down. And out of the silence beneath him came up the sound of beating that beat and beat, strongly and yet more strongly.

And, behold, in the depths at last, Solomon stood upright upon the corner-stone of the world, where the heart of Adam thundered with the thunder of its beating.

And he raised his hand, with the four jewels of the ring, which bore the name of the Eternal. And all the demons ran to him, and cried :

" At thy service, at thy service, King Solomon."

Then the King of Peace gave commandment :

" Build ye the Temple invisible ! "

And so soon as he had said this the drop of gall fell upon his lip. And, standing upright, he died.

But the demons think that he yet liveth. And, under the ring uplifted on the hand of Solomon, carving justice from unrighteousness, and in war graving the image of peace, from century to century, from generation to generation, even to the end of days, they build, in spite of themselves, the Temple of the Messiah.

THE END